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Henry Steeber interview for the Emmanuel Ringelblum Collection

Henry Steeber

Charles Berry

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Oral History Project of Dayton, Ohio
Holocaust Survivors of the Miami Valley, Ohio

Wright State University in conjunction with the Jewish Community Council of ^{Dayton} Dayton, Ohio

Interviewer: Dr. Charles Berry = CB
Interviewee: Henry Steeber = HS
CoInterviewee: Louise Steeber = LS
Side 1 (Tape 1 - Side 1)

CB: This is Tuesday, January 9, 1979, and I am in the living of the apartment of Mr. Henry Steeber for the first of several interview sessions with him. Mr. Steeber, how old are you?

HS: I'm 59.

CB: What was your date of birth?

HS: October 31, 1919.

CB: In Vienna?

HS: In Vienna.

CB: And you grew up in Vienna. You spent your early years...

HS: Yes, I lived in Vienna until I was 12.

CB: Does your family go far back? Were they always Austrians or do you know when they came to Vienna?

HS: I don't know--well my mother's family was half German. My mother's mother came from Berlin and my mother's father was Viennese, and his family went...we followed it up until...about in 1799 in Vienna. We can't do it very much further for, you know, under Empress Maria Theresa the Jews were thrown out of Austria. So it had to be after that time that they started again. My father's mother came from Vienna. My father and mother were first cousins. My mother's father and my father's mother were brother and sister. So of course it's the same background then for half of it, the same background as for my mother. My grandfather came from Moravia, my father's father. I never knew him. I knew all the other grandparents and I knew my great-grandmother. She was from Berlin.

She was a Berliner, but I never knew my grandfather on my father's side.

CB: Was your name Steeber or did you change your name when you came here?

HS: No, it was always Steeber, but it was spelled differently. It was S-t-i-e-b-e-r. My name was Heinz, Heinz Stieber. But when I came here everybody pronounced it "Sty-ber" and I hated Styber, so I made it Steeber. Now nobody understands it at all anymore. It was somewhat of a mistake. And Heinz was always a little too German for me.

CB: Were you the only child or did you have brothers and sisters?

HS: Yes! I was the only child of my parents.

CB: Did other family members other than you and your parents live in your household, such as grandparents? Did they live with you for awhile?

HS: My grandparents lived for awhile with us, yes. Actually we lived with my grandparents for awhile. My father was a vice-president of a bank in Vienna and there was a big crash of banks; when the Bankverein crashed in Vienna a lot of other banks followed and he lost his job and he went to Bucharest for awhile. We didn't move there. Father was in Bucharest, Romania, for awhile, he had something to do with oil. What it really was I never found out. It never was quite clear what he did in Bucharest and my mother and I moved in with my grandparents. They had a very large apartment in Vienna. We lived with them.

CB: Now, these were her parents, or your father's parents?

HS: Her parents.

CB: Her parents. What was their name?

HS: Jaff. (spelled by HS)

CB: And you say your father was the vice-president of a bank.

HS: Yes. Of a bank in Vienna, until 1929.

CB: The great world-wide crash. Did your mother work?

HS: No.

CB: What was the education of your parents? Had they gone to college?

HS: No, no. High school as was normal.

CB: Gymnasium?

HS: Yes, gymnasium, that was the normal education. They received Matura - a diploma - considerably more difficult, of course, than anything which has been invented here yet, (as High School graduation) but I really have no idea. It never came to my mind, really.

CB: Was your family religious?

HS: No, no. They were very - in one word, no. Not even my grandparents were particularly religious. I know I went with my grandfather once or twice to a synagogue, but I don't really know why we went. I took religious instruction. You see, in Vienna, Catholicism is the state religion, of course, and the religious instruction is compulsory in school. Now in school itself you get Catholic instruction. For the Jews, it was given at other times, and in other places. You received time off during the religious instruction in school and had to take it at some other time, somewhere else. Everybody had to take these instructions, so I took them, too. Like in many cases is true today, unfortunately, this instruction was strictly one of observance, not of background, not of any knowledge. No knowledge whatsoever was imparted in it. We did learn how to pray and print in Hebrew, you learn how to be able to read a prayer book, but nobody told you what it meant at all. You had no idea what it meant. You were told "Don't ask questions, just read, read." I had no religious upbringing at all. I would say

that the little observance I developed was much later. My parents were as assimilated as you can become assimilated.

CB: So you seldom attended synagogue.

HS: Seldom. Very seldom, in Vienna.

CB: Not even on the High Holy Days?

HS: No. I just stayed home from school because it would not look nice if you would have gone to school.

CB: Were you Bar Mitzvahed?

HS: Yes, by my own request. That was in Berlin and my parents thought it was very cute. But my Bar Mitzvah was not a Bar Mitzvah as you would think, here of Bar Mitzvah in the United States. I didn't even read from the Torah, the Haftorah. All it was--I went up and I sort of said the blessing before and afterwards, the readings that was it. (The usual practice in the United States is for the 13 year old to conduct a full service as his Bar Mitzvah.)

CB: So would you say that this Bar Mitzvah was more of a coming of age exercise?

HS: I would think so, yes.

CB: It was a celebration rather than a religious event?

HS: No, it was a religious event--you see the synagogues were a little bit different there. It was what you would call a liberal synagogue there which was the closest you could come to a conservative synagogue here, probably. In Berlin there was a time I went to the synagogue pretty regularly on holidays and so on. I went a lot on High Holidays and regular holidays, other holidays. For Pesach (Passover) or Shavous, I would go to the synagogue and I went there quite comparatively frequently. More than once a year.

CB: With friends or with family?

HS: No! Alone. Alone. Alone, as far as I can remember, I don't think I

went with friends. You know it is a funny thing because, uh, memory is so very selective. There are periods which are extremely clear and periods which are very hazy and it has nothing necessarily to do with time. Something which happened much earlier can be much clearer than something which happened later.

CB: What was the principle language spoken in your home?

HS: German.

CB: German. did your parents speak, or your grandparents speak any other languages?

HS: My parents spoke both English and French and we spoke English. My mother liked to speak English. My father was not good in languages. He spoke, but very, very, very little really. My mother spoke well, English and French, but she liked to speak English, so we spoke English quite a bit at home and so it was always easy for me. Actually I think when I came to the States, I spoke English better than I speak it now. But...I also had a French, uh, English, sometimes a French, sometimes an English tutor, "Hofmeister". I don't know whether you have heard the expression "Hofmeister".

CB: And I assume you studied English in school.

HS: Yes.

CB: Formally. But when you say you spoke, your mother liked to speak English at home, was this common or was it a rather infrequent thing? Did you, for example, say, "Now this evening during supper we're going to carry on our conversation in English," and you would do that, oh, every evening, or was it just something?

HS: No. We would talk once in awhile in English. No it was not a regular occurrence, but we talked for ten minutes maybe in English, then we'd go right back to German. For both of us of course it was easier at the time to speak German, naturally.

CB: When you were living with your mother's parents was your grandfather retired at the time?

HS: Yes.

CB: What occupation had he been in?

HS: He was a merchant. He had an import and export firm for mother-of-pearl buttons etc. uh... Here, I give you a little idea how he looked. Say something nice while I'm away. It's the only picture actually which I have left. So it gives you a little idea. It's easier to talk about people once you see them.

CB: This is a family group.

HS: Yes, this is my great grandmother, my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother and my mother's brother.

CB: It's a lovely picture. I love the collars on the dresses and the fabric and length, both at once .

HS: It was taken in about 1910.

CB: Very nice. What about your father's father, what occupation did he have?

HS: He was a manufacturer of colored paper, "Buntpapier". You know, you used to take to cut out things. They got them in books.

CB: It was construction paper?

HS: Yes, but glossy, it was glossy and thinner. It was like construction paper, but glossy surface and they had them in books in different colors for children mostly, also I guess for wrappings, etc. He was dead by the time I was around. I only know he was a manufacturer of colored paper. What exactly he did, I don't know.

CB: Did you travel very much as a youth, on vacations?

HS: Yes!

CB: Into other countries?

HS: No. Other countries- we went to Italy, once in awhile to the former Austrian province of "Südtirol" to the Dolomite mountains. It was then Italy at that time after WWI. We thought we would spend some time there. We had a summer apartment in Bad Ischl (47.43N, 13.37E) which is a very nice spa^{it} was made famous by Emperor Francis Joseph. He went there during the summer. So it was a place to go, I suppose. I don't know. But we had an apartment there and we went for a number of summers. Most of our summers we were stationary and in Austria, you know, various places in Austria. But at that time, you know, especially in the early time, until '29, we traveled, I think. In summer, you know, you went to the country and you took the help along. We always had three people that was normal. There was nothing particular about that you know. Sounds fantastic today, but there was nothing particular at the time there were no electric appliances. My parents took the help over from my father's parents, so they, of course, they ruled the place. These were people of course, who made a great impression on me in my youth. You know, I remember every detail about them. Marie Sudooda was the cook, and Lena Mayer was the maid, and Fraulein Paula was my nurse and was with me for a long time, for many years.

CB: Were these Jewish women? Gentile?

HS: Oh, no, no, no.

CB: Gentile.

HS: No, no. Very Gentile, sure. There was no Jewish help. It didn't exist.

CB: I take it then that you were more or less upper middle class, manufacturing-commercial roots and backgrounds^{it} so forth, and you thought of yourself as being rather comfortably off, possibly?

HS: Yes, Yes.

CB: You say that your parents were very assimilated.

HS: Very.

CB: Do you recall that in their activities- recreational, cultural, social- they associated primarily with Gentiles or with Jews?

HS: There was no difference.

CB: No distinction at all?

HS: I don't think so. You know this is a strange thing, as anti-Semitic as Austria was, nobody asked; nobody ever asked whether you were a Jew or not when you were in a social situation. This came only much later, and only thinking back you think whether these were Jews or not, but at the time you did not really know.

CB: Raise the question?

HS: Yes. Raise the question whether they were Jews or not. Again I guess this is one part of being assimilated, I suppose. I just read a book about Gustav Mahler, who was not a friend of my parents, but my parents knew him, my father knew him. My father was interested in music. I come across names, you know, names in the book which I knew from our family. Names which are friends of the family, I think, are mentioned in the book here, and only now when I think about it- sure he must have been a Jew. But I don't think ever anybody thought about it whether he was a Jew or not. Of course you couldn't get certain jobs if you were a Jew. Anti-Semitism was strong, but there was a certain social intercourse where really it didn't matter. That was very strange.

CB: Am I wrong? Did not (Mahler) have to convert?

HS: Sure. To become director of the opera.

CB: To become director of the opera.

HS: Oh, sure! He could not have been director of the opera. I heard a lot of things; we had a lot of relatives and friends I remember

very well. Dr. Burger was a cousin of my mother and probably was the leading gynecologist in Vienna. And he never was able to get a professorship at the University because he refused to convert. He was a Jew and he couldn't get a professorship.

CB: Within your circle of friends, acquaintances, your family's business connections and so forth; among that group, that larger group, which was Jewish, to what extent was the synagogue the center of their activities? Were they totally assimilated?

HS: No. Jews at this time, assimilated Jews of this time were quite anti-Semitic themselves and there was a great urge to be just like the non-Jews, just like the Christians, just a little bit more so. It may sound a little bitter. It was so for a long time, but you're in a situation and you do not notice it, you do not notice what you do to yourself, what you do to others, but in retrospect and with 20/20 hindsight you see what you did. And I think it was quite vicious what many of our people did. And there was of course a great animosity against Eastern Jews, which was heartily reciprocated, naturally, but that was a thing that was done. You would not probably have social contact with an Eastern Jew; you would have social contact with a non-Jew, but not with an Eastern Jew. There was much more there. I remember that my grandfather, who would write humorous verses at some appropriate or inappropriate occasions, wrote about a friend of his, a friend who was acceptable by that time. He had some kind of anniversary or whatever, a doctor Kolischer. My grandfather wrote one of the things that remained for posterity, one of the verses, and which translates quite easily "and though he is a Polisher, long live Dr. Kolisher".

CB: What kinds of activities or associations did your family engage in or belong to? I'm thinking, for example, in terms of theater. Did

they subscribe to the theater? Did they have seats, what we would call season tickets to the theater?

HS: I don't think so. I don't think so. Don't forget there was a break in '29, number one, right?

CB: Yes.

HS: And then there was another one in '31 when things were not good. So much of the time I remember is not even in Vienna, it's in Berlin. I remember more about life in Berlin, than I remember about life in Vienna. We went to the theater. They went to the theater and opera. There was a lot of music. Both of them liked music. We had house music. My father played the viola and, uh, this I remember, see how ridiculous it is that I remember the man who played the cello, Dr. Kimous. Now why would I remember him? I have no idea who played the violins.

CB: What about politics? Did your family, in Vienna or in Berlin participate?

HS: No, no, not really. Just strictly, I will say strictly bourgeois politics, I will call it that. My grandfather, he liked the Social Democrats. He was a semi-Social Democrat. It was quite daring at the time to be a Social Democrat. He liked to shock people. I think that was his aim more than anything else. I think they were completely politically rather naive, as most people were. There was really no participation in politics! As long as you had plenty to eat and everything was nice and comfortable, why, why rock the boat? If they were anything my parents were Monarchists. The good days, you know, the good times were when the Hapsburgs were there.

CB: Now, these, what, ten years that you lived in Vienna. Your first ten years?

HS: Twelve years.

CB: Twelve years, 1919 to 1931. As you look back and remember them, even though your memory is not going to be very sharp because you were just a child?

HS: Yeah, well, I remember a lot of it, rather well.

CB: Do you think of them with warm feelings?

HS: Yes.

CB: Of happiness and comfort?

HS: Yes.

CB: And security?

HS: Yes, yes, generally, yes.

CB: And the reason I ask that is that I grew up in a small town in East Texas where there was a very small Jewish community, maybe ten families at the most, and one of the Jews in the community, a very good friend of ours, was from Vienna and she had left Vienna in 1919 or 1920, I believe it was. She frequently spoke about how bad things were in Vienna right at the tail end of Word War I.

HS: Terrible, terrible!

CB: The shortage of food!

HS: Terrible, terrible!

CB: Happy if you could find a rat to bake.

HS: Terrible, terrible! That was again a matter where the people with money had it a little bit easier, a little bit better.

CB: And I assume she probably came from the lower class, but you don't remember those kinds of shortages.

HS: Only from tales do I know that. The greatest hardship for my parents was, and I don't want to sound cynical and don't want to sound glib, but looking back at some of the things or if you see it in a movie or think about it, how superficial people were these days, but it was a life then. There was a lot of superficiality to

it, but I remember that my parents had to go to Budapest to go to a confectioner because they didn't get stuff in Vienna. At Damels (probably the name of a confectionary store), they didn't have anything, so they went to a store in Budapest which was a very big, very beautiful confectionary store. They went to Budapest to eat, uh, to get enough whipped cream. It was, you see, this was the difference. Now I was very badly nourished as a child. I had, I don't know that I really had it, but so I was told, I had rickets as a child because of the lack of proper nourishment. You could not get food it was terrible in Vienna, there's no question about it. But again I don't remember. What I remember when I start remembering, was when I was about five or six years old, was when I went to school first, I remember very well, but then there was enough to eat.

CB: Did the onset of the Depression and the crash and the closing of the bank in 1929?

HS: That didn't make any impression on me.

CB: Did it not drastically change your lifestyle?

HS: No!

CB: Other than moving in with grandparents?

HS: Oh, sure. There was a lack of money, I'm sure. I think I really was a problem child, for awhile. I was sick a lot and what it was nobody every knew. I really don't know for sure whether I faked it or whether I really was sick. I was a bad student for my first year of what was high school in Austria which was fifth grade. I really was very bad then. They sent me to another school. My mother sent me to another school in Grinzig, a kind of private school. Whether it was easier or whether they were just bored with me, I don't know, but I went there until I went to Berlin. Then in Berlin the

schools were much easier I think than in Vienna. It was not hard as the Austrian schools. Austrian schools were very, very hard, very difficult. Then I did all right, but I think I had problems at this time. Exactly what it was I don't know, but I know that my mother was unhappy and that other people were unhappy and there were councils about "What to do with Heinzle?" There must have been problems, you know? Maybe it would come back to me, but I don't even really try, you know?

CB: When your father went to Budapest (the capital of Hungary)

HS: Bucharest. (the capital of Romania)

CB: I'm sorry, Bucharest! What job did he hold?

HS: He was in oil, with an oil company. What he did with the oil company I never really found out. He had something to do with petroleum.

CB: And how long was he in Bucharest, two years?

HS: Two years.

CB: He came back in '31.

HS: He came back and went to Berlin in '31. Whatever he did didn't work out very well in Bucharest, quite obviously. He came back in I think '30. In the beginning of '31, I think. He came in the spring of '31 and then my mother followed him in the summer. She left Berlin in the summer and I stayed for a couple of months with my grandparents and then I left sometime in the fall of '31 from Berlin. It was my first train trip, solo train trip. It made a great impression on me and I hoped it would never end.

CB: You were in Berlin until '36 or '38?

HS: In '36.

CB: All right.

HS: In '36, yes.

CB: And that would have made you 17 years old, then. Seventeen or eighteen years old.

HS: Thirty-six would make me 16 or 17.

CB: Yes, 16 or 17. Now, the schools that you went to both in Vienna and you mentioned another name a little while ago Gastein (Gastein was the name of a place famous for its water cures).

HS: No, Grinzig. That was just a suburb of Vienna, you know, a private school.

CB: And in Berlin, were they private schools or public schools?

HS: Public schools except for this one school, this one year in Grinzig. It was one year, two years? It was two years, but the second year I left.

CB: Now back to languages again. Of course you were native-speaking German?

HS: German.

CB: German. And you spoke English at home. What about your schooling?

HS: Well, my first language in school was English, my second language was French and my third language was Latin.

CB: All right, in French, were you as fluent as you were in English?

HS: No, I never was as fluent as in English. I was much more fluent than I am now because I had a lot more practice, but I never did as well and I never spoke as well as I spoke English, and Latin was a completely lost cause with me, unfortunately.

CB: Now, in Berlin during your school days beginning in 1931. Hitler comes to power in '33, late January of '33?

HS: The 30th of January.

CB: So that '33, '34, '35, '36- that means four years you would have been in school in Berlin after Hitler came to power. Do you recall being increasingly aware of anti-Semitism in the school system?

HS: Yes.

CB: Could you give me any examples of how this was manifested? Teachers discriminating against you or harassment by fellow students?

HS: I really don't think that in Berlin it was really not as bad as elsewhere. There was always a difference between Berlin and the rest of the country, I think. Berlin was always not quite as bad as the rest of Germany. There were teachers, though, most teachers I think were Nazis, were National Socialists. Some were not. The discrimination, there was some, the trend of the teaching was completely nationalistic, of course. As far as the teachers were concerned I really, ~~I don't~~, I cannot say, except for remarks from one or two, that I suffered from the teachers. I think it was more certain people, certain school friends, I'll call them friends. Especially I had one friend who was, of all people an Armenian. It wasn't in '33, but I was thinking in '35 or so, he cut me dead. He didn't want to have anything to do with me anymore and this was one thing which hurt me very much. I know that his father was violently anti-Nazi. Well, it was just the peer influence and I guess he couldn't help. But I would think it was the contrary many times as far as the teachers are concerned. We went to a camp, the school went to a camp once a year. I don't remember the details why or how, I don't remember anymore, but my parents were doubtful whether I should go and they talked with one or two of the teachers. They said, "Oh, definitely he should go. It would be a mistake if he wouldn't." I was only a teenager. "It would be a mistake if you wouldn't go." So I went. So the first day, the first morning, every morning they put up the flag and saluted the flag and had some kind of a little speech and a little saying and the first saying, the first morning it was a quote- maybe it was the second morning- a

quote from Dr. Joseph Goebbels (the Minister of Propaganda) said, "The Jew has no place in our **F**olksgemeinschaft" which means in our folk community. So after I heard this I went to ~~the~~ whoever was in charge and I said "If he hasn't what am I doing here?" He said, "Well, I think you're right, it's better that you leave." And I think that was just about the end of my German school experience in Berlin.

CB: How old were you at that time? What year was that?

HS: That must have been '36. That's when I left the school in Berlin. I went to Austria. My parents sent me to Austria to friends who had a house in Macha on the Danube and so I stayed there for the summer and I was interested in photography at that time and they had a very good- of course Austria was still Austria you know, at that time (before the "Anschluss" between Germany and Austria of April 1938) - school in Vienna; the "Graphische Lehr und Versuchsanstalt", which taught, among other things, photography, but also various other arts and graphic techniques. I enrolled. I was able to enroll in that school. So I stayed then in Vienna and I stayed with some people. I had a room with some people and friends, acquaintances, and stayed there from 1936 until 1938. Until Hitler came into Austria.

CB: Now let me back up and before we get into your Vienna photography school there are still other questions I would like to pose about your years in Berlin. What impact did the coming to power of Hitler have on your family and their activities and their outlooks and religion? Did they begin to become more religious?

HS: No! I don't think there was any in the beginning at all. I mean there were just a somewhat, uh... somewhat detached from the whole thing. "It's not going to last!" First that it's not going to last,

number two that is not directed at us and after all we are Austrians, we are not disturbing the peace. We felt that it is not going to last! Besides my parents at that time, we were Austrians in Germany. We were foreigners! So again that attitude- detached point of view. Also being Austrian my father had no problem with his job. He was at that time representative of a Danish vacuum cleaner company in Berlin, in Germany, of the Niefisk Co. So again they felt that it's not going to concern them. Also you could see in Berlin the trend was- the trend, of the Berliners too-somehow was not to take these things quite seriously. I remember the beginning of '33, I think it was '33. It was the first boycott of Jewish shops in Berlin. Wasn't it '33? It was April or something.

CB: March. (The boycott was actually on April 1, 1933)

HS: March of '33! Well, there was some unpleasantness now and then, but generally it was very much disregarded and ignored by the people. They would- the SA (Hitler's Brown Shirt uniformed storm troopers) would go around in the trucks with the loudspeakers- they said in German "Don't buy from Jews" and, "The Jews are our misfortune," I don't think it was taken seriously by many people. I remember very well standing there and watching people going in and out of stores and being badgered by SA people, and SA troopers. They would laugh and some wouldn't go and some would go and there was no unpleasantness- I didn't see any of it. It was easy to ignore it, somehow, the whole situation, at least in the beginning.

CB: Did that pertain up to 1936, you saw no unpleasantness?

HS: Well, I think we had unpleasantness. Oh, there were signs of course. Signs appeared, reading in German "Jews are not wanted". In Berlin they had a habit of putting these signs right in the back of cafes or restaurants right in the back where nobody could see them,

you know. Some didn't of course. I cannot, I don't remember any unpleasant incident in Berlin, actually, anything unpleasant until 1938.

CB: Did you witness any of these mass spectacles, parades, assemblies? Did you ever see Hitler, for example?

HS: I never saw Hitler until Vienna. In Vienna I saw Hitler. I never saw him before. Oh, I saw him on the first of May we would see the May Day parade, etc. Again you see we could watch it in the beginning, in 1933 or 1934. You could watch a May Day parade with the swastikas going by without stretching out your arm. Nobody was hitting you if you didn't do it, if you didn't extend your sincere German greeting. No, I think the first was in 1938, in November 1938. Except that you didn't go to a place where you saw a sign "Jews are not wanted" and of course it sort of got tighter and tighter and in '38 one tried very much to get out of the country already, but one was not able to anymore, you know, in many cases. So in the beginning I do not think really, except for my school experience, that it was really not possible for me or at least very unpleasant for me to go to school. I don't remember how long it was possible to go to school, really, until they threw out all the Jews from the schools, I just don't remember it, but I really don't remember any unpleasantness.

CB: Did you and your family have many friends who were leaving in that period of '35, '36.

HS: Yes.

CB: '37?

HS: Yes. Yes. Yes, a number of them, yah. You see again my parents were not ready. I was young enough and I guess I was rather immature even for my age, protected and immature for my age, but I remember

that I was the first one in the ... (tape runs out on Tape 1, Side 1)

Holocaust Oral History of Henry Steeber

Side 2 (Tape 1 Side 2)

CB: This is the second side of the tape for the first session with Mr Steeber. Now, Mr Steeber you were saying that you were the first one in your family to say that you wanted to leave?

HS: My parents still had a certain feeling of security. Again assimilated people, people who lived in Germany and Austria for so long just could not understand that, did not think it possible, that any of this anti-Semitism could be really directed against them. It was just an aberration which had to stop any moment now. I didn't really think so and I wanted to get out I started to look myself, very late; we couldn't get an affidavit. Well this comes later, I mean my search for exit but I think my parents recognized the danger, the real danger too late, too late!

CB: What month did you leave Berlin for Vienna? When you went to the photography school?

HS: Well I didn't go to the photography school immediately. I went to uh to stay with some friends in Austria, it must have been in June 1936.

CB: Do you recall the Nuremburg Laws in 1936? Were you in Germany when they were passed?

HS: Yes, yes! They were passed while I was still in Germany.

CB: I think that the Spring, late Winter or early spring of '36.

HS: It was '35 wasn't it? (Actually it was on September 15, 1935).

CB: Well it may have been '35 I'm not sure.

HS: I think it was '35, yes! Again, many of them were taken somewhat as a joke. Some of them were quite funny, you know. Especially that they can't take a maid who is younger than forty years old. I remember thinking wait, wait. Some of it was hideous, some of them

were absurd even then these laws were taken much lighter than *they* should have been. We did not have maid~~s~~ of any kind anymore so it did not make any difference. But it was not as bad as the laws which were passed after 1938 when you had to wear the star and take Israel and Sarah as middle name. These things were personal, which affected everybody personally you know. But these (the so-called Nuremburg Laws) in a way they were ridiculous. Unfortunately, the great tragedy was that so many people who should have known better did regard many of these things as ridiculous, didn't take Hitler serious, never read "Mein Kampf" (the book of Hitler's aims). If they had read it they never would have believed it, it was just another book by a crazy guy. Nobody thought it would last! In 1934 when the Rhein ~~put~~^{put}sch (the remilitarization of the Rhein Valley) was. Then everybody thought it would be over quickly. They said see it didn't last long. (France, Britain and Belgian were displeased, so it was believed that at least one of them would throw Hitler out).

CB: Were you very athletic? Were inclined to be athletic or interested in athletics?

HS: No! No! Absolutely not! I am unfortunately very unathletic. I think that I have two left feet.

CB: I ask this because of what you told me before we turned on the tape about your escapes which we will go into later on in some detail. They made me think that you must have developed a certain agility.

HS: Not at all! Not at all. It was strictly what it came to do when you are frightened to death.

CB: Were you more interested as you reached your teens, 14, 15, 16 years old so forth, were you more interested in business and commerce or in art, music, painting and culture.

HS: I think so.

CB: The latter?

HS: Yes! No, I never was interested in business and commercial *subjects*, unfortunately, I was much more practical. Being a photographer I was interested in photography, you know. I liked museums I saw a lot of pictures and listened to a lot of music.

CB: You say that you came from a home that was very appreciative of music. That your father had contact with Mahler. Do you remember any other musical figures of the era either in Austria or Germany, major or minor with whom your family had contact or that you met personally?

HS: I know Lotte Lehmann. She was a singer she was friend (she was a soprano born in 1888).

CB: Kurt Weill's wife?

HS: Yes. Elisabeth Schuhmann.

Elisabeth Schuhmann, I knew Lotte Lehmann a little, but Elisabeth Schuhmann she was a friend of the family. There was a story that she sang for me. I have no idea anymore what it was. Some critics such as Richard Speckter. I read about him. (transcriber is not certain of the spelling ^{it} may be Specht)

CB: He's quite famous!

HS: What? Oh, he is? Well actually I never knew him, I knew his wife, he died before my time. There must have been some others. It was really before the age when I would have appreciated these things. Today I am sorry it was before my reaching ^(such an) age. I would have had fun if I would have been more aware of it then.

CB: When you started the photography school in Vienna, and you say that you studied that for two years before you were kicked out, expelled because of your being a Jew, were you more oriented toward

commercial photography, or artistic photography.

HS: Commercial photography, advertising photography.

CB: You were training for a career in commercial photography?

HS: Well, at that time, you see it was a three year course and I only could take two so I didn't do everything that they taught. I did portraits and commercial and so on. However later, after this, I did work in commercial photography, also in early color photography. If I talk to today's photographers they will say "these old fogies? What do they know- what stories they are telling? All these lies!"

CB: Did you have contact with any Austrian photographers?

HS: German photographers, if any.

CB: German photographers who might have some reputation in the development of photography or have become famous as artistic photographers, landscape photographers?

HS: I don't think anybody with a reputation. I was connected with some, but I can't remember the names right. There was nobody really who made any mark who has name recognition.

CB: None of your teachers were famous?

HS: Well there was one teacher, I think that she did nice things and became famous after the war. I can't think of her name right now, that is a strange thing. And I know her very well, she was a strange woman she was an early Nazi an illegal Nazi. Before 1938 the Nazi party was not legal in Austria but she was about the only decent person in the whole school. It was a horrible terribly Nazi-ist school. The school became a hotbed of Naziism but she was really decent. She behaved very, very decently, Lucca Chmel was her name (spelled by HS). She became I guess, semi-famous after the war. She was the only person really I looked up after the war when

I came back to Vienna. I said "Listen if you have any problems if you need anybody to vouch for you, or such a thing come to me," She was very decent, she was a decent soul. She was just about the only one. Otherwise professor Madensky, he was the department head, I think that he is a well known photographer, but I think that he was an out and out Nazi. After the war I came back and I saw him and he said the only thing he regretted was that I was still alive. So this was the faculty.

CB: Well I have kept you know about an hour and I think I will terminate this session and we will take it up at that point next time.

End of the first session

CB: This is the second interview session with Mr. Henry Steeber. It is Tuesday February the 6th 1979 and we are in the living room of his apartment.

CB: Mr. Steeber, when did you get to Vienna to enter the school?

HS: In 1938.

CB: In June or February?

HS: No I left Berlin to stay with friends in the Vachau which is an area not far from Vienna for the summer and then I went in the early fall, I suppose, I went to Vienna and took a test, an entrance exam for the school and was accepted.

CB: Now that was the Fall of '38?

HS: Of '38. No, I am sorry, I am wrong, what are we talking about, it was '36. (This was stated earlier)

CB: Fall of '36?

HS: In '36. In '38 I didn't get anywhere anymore.

CB: So you had been in Vienna a year and a half then, before the Anschluss? From the Fall of '36 to the early Spring of '38?

HS: Correct! Yes!

CB: Now we talked about the photography school last time so I am not going to ask you questions about that today but I would like to get your analysis and comments on the politics of Austria in this sort of touch and go period when Schuschnigg (Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg) was the prime minister and trying to hold off the Germans and at the same time satisfy the Nationalists in Austria and how that had an impact on the Jewish population in Vienna.

HS: The Jews, of course, at least the Jews I came in contact with, again I cannot talk for the masses, you know I had quite a number of friends. Some relatives in Vienna and they were of course, much by necessity, all the Jews were pro - Schuschnigg there was no

other way. Schuschnigg was not considered ideal, but it was only the least evil choice.

CB: The best choice available?

HS: The least evil!

CB: The least evil, leaving much to be desired?

HS: That is right. By that time there was a great amount of anti-Semitism and that became more. There always was a lot of anti-Semitism you know, in Vienna of course but it came more and more into the open at that time. In school, the Nazi party was still illegal for a good part of the time until Schuschnigg went to Berchtesgaden (Hitler's residence in the Alps). I would say that among the teachers about 80% were illegal Nazis. This was not necessarily expressed in their attitudes towards Jews. There were very few Jews in that school, very few. Our department head (Madenisky) was a Nazi and an anti-Semite and as unpleasant as a person can be. He had an assistant, a woman, Lucca Chmel, she became quite a well known photographer, who was an illegal party member. I don't know what Madenisky even was, but she was an illegal party member. She did everything possible to soften the blows. She was a very very sensitive and decent woman. She was the only person I remember when I came back to Vienna after the war I looked up and told her that anything I can do for her to let me know and that I would be very happy to do it. Yes that woman, C-h-m-e-l, a rather difficult name, was the only person where I went after the war and asked if she needed any references I'd be happy to provide them. She had trouble of course having been an illegal party member. She was very very decent, but the student body and the teachers were rather unpleasant. It got more and more unpleasant as time went on.

CB: Did that take the form of acts of violence or was it just merely slurs?

HS: Slurs. There were fights. I had one fight that I remember, physical fight with a chap from Switzerland of all places, a Swiss who was very smitten with the ideology. There were not constant fights of course, but it was verbal of course usually. Outside of the school, really life went on as usual and Jews still went to the cafe house and talked and nobody really believed it would happen. At that time I must say truthfully it did not seem that there was an imminent danger of a Nazi takeover. We didn't see very much! You know that it's very easy with hindsight to see that it was inevitable that Hitler would take over. However at that time you lived in a small country, you still had all the foreign papers you could talk whatever you wanted as long as it was to the right, left (Communist and Socialist) talk was not taken so easily. You had a certain feeling of safety there you know. You saw what was going on in Germany and Austria. Even when Schuschnigg went to Berchdesgaden and came back you still thought: "Oh he made an excellent speech!"

CB: Was there any tendency to deny Jews entry into shops?

HS: No! Before Hitler?

CB: Before the Anschluss, in Vienna?

HS: No! Absolutely not, a lot of shops. A great many shops were owned by Jews including larger ones, the department stores. No, absolutely not! There was no overt anti-Semitism, even in the newspaper. There really was not anymore than there always was. Again, naturally I did not mingle among the frantic Nazis. The frantic Nazis of course they were there and they were much more of course in the provinces such as in Graz (47.4N, 15.27E) there were nothing but.

CB: That was my next question was Vienna a center of Naziism or was it more in the other towns?

HS: More in the other towns and villages. Even in Vienna there was enough but its a matter of degrees. You know if someboyd bashes in your head I don't know whether everybody agrees or if only 50% of the people agree; the result is the same. There were more incidents I think ^{that} was the crux of the matter.

CB: When would you say the real crisis developed? As far as German-Austrain relations were concerned?

HS: With the meeting in Berchdesgaden (at that meeting on Feb 12, 1938 Hitler had a temper tantrum against Schuschnigg who then gave into Hitler's demands)

CB: In February?

HS: Whenever it was, it was February wasn't it? I think the 25th of February or something like that because then Schuschnigg went to Berchdesgaden and came back but then he made a tremendous speech before the Bundestag before the Austrian Parliament. Schuschnigg and everyone was elated that he had stood his ground against Hitler. Schuschnigg made the speech kind of kidding Hitler and ridiculing him. It was very uplifting. But of course immediately he had to legalize the Nazi party. He had to take Nazis into the government (Reischenau and Seyss-Inquart). Even then it was ridiculous that one didn't see the handwriting on the wall more than we really saw it. Then Schuschnigg started the drive for the plebiscite. At the same time he let loose his drive, Schuschnigg as suddenly found his love for the Socialists again. He let them loose you know but of course it was much too late. I think if he would have done this two years earlier, let the socialists back in maybe it could have been worked, I don't know! Schuschnigg was rather

unfortunately extremely unpopular. He would probably have won the plebiscite somehow but with the pressure (from the Nazis) and so on but he was forced to call it off. With all due respect if there is a typical Jesuit he was a typical Jesuit. He was very intellectual which is already a sin to start with to be an intellectual. He was very intellectual, very clerical in his whole approach. He was a little bit too much holier than thou in many respects. Anyhow once the outbursts started then already I would say; it was in the beginning of March during the first week of March, you should have seen where things were leading. There was a German travel bureau near the opera in Vienna. There was suddenly a big picture of Hitler in the window and the swastika and flowers all over. It was overflowing with flowers in front of Hitler's picture, well, then we came to the 11th of March (actually the Anschluss was on March 14, 1938).

CB: March!

HS: The 11th of March and the abdication of Schuschnigg and the entering of the Germans and you should have seen Vienna after he abdicated. That was full of people rejoicing. All the police immediately with the swastika on the sleeves and everybody sporting a swastika. You could be sure that anybody who didn't have a swastika was a Jew. Even the people who were not pro Nazi at that time wore the swastika just because it was the thing of the hour.

CB: Did you feel any panic? Do you recall?

HS: I don't think so! Don't forget I came from Germany where they had had it for five years already, the Nazis. So I had it ⁱⁿ Germany for so many years! It was a great disappointment, it was a great letdown. I felt very very badly about it. I thought that I knew what was in the offing, because I had the experience before, it was

really not too new to me. There was a lot of panic of course. There were a lot of suicides there were lot of people running around like chicken with the head cut off. The jubilation of the Viennese and contentment of the Viennese was there. It was enormous, just enormous, just unbelievable!

CB: Did you begin to make any plans about what to do?

In your circle of friends, for example, was there talk about what action you could take?

HS: It was kind of falling apart, the whole thing was, it was everybody for himself. You know I really have no recollection of any discussions on these things. I left very shortly after that, ~~stayed~~ I think I stayed until the end of the school year in Vienna. It was very unpleasant but they didn't throw me out until I finished the second year. I think I stayed until June. Truthfully, I don't have many recollections of that time. I know what went on in Vienna. I know that again, the young punks went into the coffee houses and restaurants and so on and tried to collect Jews and take them out and have them scrub streets and other unpleasantness so it was a very rough time.

CB: Were you able to avoid all that?

HS: I was able to avoid all that, by stealth and just being as careful as possible. I don't know, but I don't look, you know, like the Nazis stereotype picture of Jews which they had in Der Stuermer, the anti-Semitic paper. I didn't look like this, that was one thing. Of course I didn't wear a swastika, that was the sign that something was wrong with me you know.

CB: How quickly were the anti-Semitic decrees of Germany enforced in Austria? For example using the name Abraham and Sarah and wearing the yellow star (the wearing of that sign was not required until

later)?

HS: Israel, it was Israel (that was the required middle name for male Jews).

CB: Israel and Sarah, wearing the yellow star, having to get rid of maids who were under a specific age.

HS: You did not have the yellow star at that time. The yellow star came later. The yellow star came after, Kristallnacht. (That was the night of November 9-10, 1938).

CB: What about such things as the Nuremburg laws were they immediately enforced in Austria?

HS: Yes, as soon as the Anschluss with Germany took place, you know, as soon as the Anschluss was there on the 14th of March immediately there were the same laws.

CB: Now when you were expelled from school, do you recall that incident were you called into the principal's or headmaster's office?

HS: No! No! I mean that it was quite impossible to continue to go. I don't think there was such an expulsion.

CB: No official act of expulsion?

HS: An official act of expulsion? I don't think so! As I say I really have very little recollection of this last month in Vienna.

CB: Where were you living?

HS: I was living with friends with a family across from the opera. It was a big building behind the opera. I had a room there.

CB: Was it a Jewish family?

HS: Half Jewish!

CB: Do you recall the reaction that they had?

HS: Oh they were very much disgusted very much against it. They were able to leave pretty soon I remember that. One of the sons got out of Austria very early. I think I remember that he went to Australia

very very early in the game. I think that it was before the Anschluss there were some people I think were a little bit more foresighted. They all got out. I remember, they all got out I think just about the same time I left, but even that I am not sure. I know that one daughter, Venka, she was a pianist. She went to South America and I think the mother went to England. They got out but how and why I absolutely do not remember because I think there are certain holes in my memories. It's strange to think but there are holes in the strangest places. Certain things I remember very vividly and certain things that I do not remember at all.

CB: How closely in contact were you with your family, your parents in Berlin?

HS: Constantly, by letter, constantly, probably, although I never was a great letter writer. I would say that a couple times a week!

CB: When did you lose contact with them?

HS: With my parents? Oh, I went back to Berlin.

CB: After you left Vienna?

HS: Yes!

CB: In the summer of '38?

HS: In the summer of '38, I went back to Berlin and my parents were deported in January 1942.

CB: So there was about three more years?

HS: Oh yes.

CB: What made you decide to go back to Berlin? The urging of your parents?

HS: Yes! Well the senselessness I suppose of staying in Vienna became apparent. I mean Vienna was worse than Berlin. Going back to Berlin was going to a free country at least compared to what happen in Vienna. You see in Berlin things only became very difficult after

November 1938 (Kristallnacht).

CB: How long did you remain in Berlin?

HS: I remained until the summer of '42.

CB: I am trying to get a framework now. So you were in Berlin from the summer of '38 until the end of 1942?

HS: No December of '42.

CB: December of '42.

HS: No the summer, the summer.

CB: Summer of '42? So it was four years '38 to '42. Did you find employment when you got back to Berlin? Was your father still employed?

HS: My father was employed I think until Crystal Night. You see before he was Austrian you know and then I think that he was fired, he worked for a Danish company. The law was I think at that time if a company employs a Jewish executive the company will be considered Jewish. I think that was the reason why he was fired. I don't remember exactly when it was but it was around that time but I think that it was after Kristallnacht. Yes. I worked in Berlin, for a studio, for Kaminsky. They trained people, you know people were very much training for new jobs for overseas you know all the people were shopkeepers were lawyers were editors uh writers, all occupations which were notoriously useless when you got overseas. Photography for some reason or other was a desirable occupation. I don't really know why, but it was considered a desirable occupation. We trained people, we had to give classes to people who wanted to go overseas it was necessary. I worked there and then I worked some other places too and did some commercial photography and that all ended I would say when the war started. When the war started I joined for a short time a Jewish organization a Betar. This was the

party of Jabotinsky an ultra-nationalists party (for settlement in Palestine) with Menachem Begin. They had courses to train people for Palestine. As ~~this~~ developed I went ^{along}, I was sent out to a farm and we dug potatoes and took care of cows and did other useful things but I developed an allergy for some reason or other I think it was against straw or something that was on the farm. I was swelling up and my ears were swelling up and I was full of blisters. It was terrible! Straw was the likely thing. You know you slept on straw, you worked with straw. So they send me home. Then I went to another place taking a gardening course, also a Jewish thing at a Jewish cemetery and I stayed there for about a year. I did that for a year, I worked there. I did some gardening and I guess there was no straw. It was alright you know and I kind of enjoyed this. My father had to work. Of course they took him into a factory. He had to work in a rubber factory. There, to his great embarrassment, they made prophylactics. I worked in whole lot of places starting with a textile factory where they made material it was the beginning of the synthetics and it was all very unpleasant work. There was hardly anything which was pleasant.

CB: It was forced labor?

HS: It was forced labor! We had big spools of the yarn which were raw. It had to be washed. We had to put them in the washers. I don't know the details anymore. Then they sent me to Siemens Schugert and I was winding wire on rolls. I had to solder it, you measured it and then you soldered it. That was the time when my parents were deported. I worked there. I wanted to go with them! At that time we still believed that this so called "umsietlung", German for relocation, meant that people are relocated to the East and that they would be able to live there. You see they are very good, the

Nazis, with propaganda. I remember postcards which came from Lvov (49.50N, 24.00E) and that was called Litzmanstadt at that time, with the German name. People wrote that they were able to live. Of course all that were lies. I wanted to go with them and they wouldn't let me go because I did some "War Important" work rolling wires on whatever you roll wires on. Then I was transferred from there. It was in January. It was very shortly after this, I think, that I was transferred to a paint factory. Something else very important, I am sure. There I stayed until June when life did not agree with me in Berlin, any more. I thought that I would have a little bit of fun before I left. They had large vats where they mixed the paint. The color of the paint came in 25 pound bags, that was the pigment which was put into the vats. There was no automation then. All the things there were done by hand. The cans were brought in and everything was done by hand. I took one of these bags of red pigment, you walked up a catwalk which led to the upper level, I took the bag and I threw it on the edge of the stairs and the thing burst. The upper level was the level of the mixers where you threw the stuff in. The pigment went all over the place! It was beautiful! I don't know whether they could use anything at all in the whole place because everything was red. It was fine stuff, it was like powder dust. It settled! It was beautiful! I left! I just went out, you know. I just walked out! I didn't bother to punch the timecard anymore. I didn't intend to collect the rest of my salary. I went home. At that time I lived again with a family. A lot of people lived together in large apartments which were all like rooming houses. It was a family Friedlander whom I lived with. They were very nice people, she was an aunt of Lieberman, who was a painter, an impressionist painter, and it was a big apartment. There were a lot of people there. I got home the next day, I think. I had a friend, a Dr Husserl, a lawyer who had good connections with the Gestapo (the German Secret State police, the initials stand for Geheime Staat's Polizei). He called me and said: "Heinz, get out!" I said "Why?" he said: "Just don't ask any questions, get out now!" "Now?" "Now!". So I packed a suitcase and I went out. To be on the safe side I went out the back way. Later I heard... (the tape ends here, however HS later explains how this departure "out the back" probably saved him.)

(Tape 1, Side 2) p. 16

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY OF HENRY STEEBER

CH This is a continuation of the second interview session with Mr. Steeber.

You finished the interview with "You walked out the back door..."

HS I walked out the back door and later, of all places, in Theresienstadt I met somebody - friends from Berlin. They were mutual friends also of Dr. Husserl and they told me that five minutes after I walked out the back. I don't even remember how they knew this - the Gestapo walked in by the front door, looking for me. So then I was standing in the street. I had some money, but not very much. And I stood there with my suitcase, and I really didn't know what I was going to do. I thought, "I'll go to Vienna." Of course that was during the war and the trains were all checked constantly by military police. They were looking mostly for deserters, people overstaying their leaves or whatever, and for undesirables. I thought that in local trains, there would not be so much checking as in the through trains, so I went from Berlin to Vienna in local trains - always riding a little bit and getting out again and taking another local train, criss-crossing Germany.

CB What we call the milk runs?

HS The milk runs - correct. It took me I think forty-eight' hours or something, at least, to get from Berlin to Vienna, which was slow. Of course, I was not in a rush. Now in Vienna again, uh, sorry...

CB Now, before your start talking about Vienna in 1942, may I back up and ask you some questions about these four years in Berlin that have come to mind as you've talked? (CB is apparently referring to an "off-tape" conversation.) Let's go back to Kristallnacht (that is the night of November 9th or 10th of 1938, when synagogues were torched and Jewish owned stores, businesses, and some homes were ransacked). Where were you? Were you at home with your parents?

HS I was at home, I think. I think that I went down to the door at night, later in the evening, and I saw on the other side of the - we lived not far from the Kurfuerstendamm (one of the best known streets in Berlin) - not right in town, but this is a long street. We lived farther out of town. There was, I think it was a tailor shop on the other side of Kurfuerstendamm. Their windows were smashed. That was the only thing I knew about at that time, until the next morning. The next morning, I walked down the Kurfuerstendamm. I usually walked down there - it was maybe a twenty minute walk to the place where I worked, to that Kaminsky studio. I walked down there and saw all the businesses shut and every other window smashed and the people milling around. The

synagogue was still burning. I think we only heard late at night that the synagogues were burning. We heard it somehow, but I don't know exactly how. Then I only found out really what had happened during the night, and saw the reaction of the people, which I will say, to the credit of the Berliners, was rather mixed. I remember walking by a smashed store window where the store had been looted and a couple was standing there and looking in and turning to each other saying, "This is our German culture, you know!" So there was a lot of sorrow about it, but there wasn't enough to do any good. That, of course, (Kristallnacht) aggravated the situation tremendously, plus that was the time Jews were completely excluded, as you know, from the theatres or sitting on the park bench, or all the other idiocies they could think of - such as the "stars". No, the star came later. (That is the "Star of David" which all Jews had to wear.) I think the star came during the war. I don't remember exactly when it was, but I think it came during the war that they had to wear it. I remember that I wore the star when I worked for another outfit. I was unloading bags from railroad cars. I got on the Staatbahn, the "S" Bahn, (the state railroad) for the first time, with a star. Of course, I didn't feel so secure with it - you can imagine. It was early morning - six o'clock in the morning - and there were only workers there. They got up and said, "You sit down. It won't last long" (meaning the wearing of the star).

That was the reaction of the workers. Now, Berlin, in my opinion, maybe Hamburg, also, but Berlin was the place where they had the least overt signs of all these harassments.

CB How do you explain that?

HS I used to think that the Berliners didn't have this anti-Semitic background like some other people. First of all, they were not Catholic. Let's face it, the Catholic Church was anti-Semitic for a long time. In the Catholic parts of Germany they had much more overt anti-Semitism than the Protestant ones - not that the Protestant didn't have any. I mean Luther was second to none in anti-Semitism after he found out that the Jews wouldn't convert to Protestantism. He was quite outspoken. But I think that it was already during a time of increased senility on his part. But the Berliners? Berlin was a very cosmopolitan city. Vienna was much more anti-Semitic with all the influx from the Balkans and so on. Vienna always was more parochial - was always more provincial, really, than Berlin was. But all the vaunted culture and music in Vienna... it was more ossified in music, theater, and so on. The new things, the avant-garde, thrived in Berlin. In Vienna, they would have thrown you out with some of the plays. If the "Drei Kroschen Oper" (the "Three Penny Opera") had been performed first in Vienna, it would never have had a second performance. So it was a much, much more

lively city where the living standard was much higher, that is, in Berlin than in Vienna. I, personally, was always much fonder of Berlin than I was of Vienna. Somehow, you know, when they had the signs: "Jews not wanted", it was like this - it was the first thing you saw! In Berlin, in many places, you had to go to the toilet to see a sign, "Jews not wanted". Somewhere in the dark corner over a toilet there was the sign, "Jews not wanted". It was a difference! But then we were excluded from any cultural life whatever. There was not much cultural life left then, after 1938.

CB Were all the synagogues burned during Kristallnacht?

HS All except the one on Levitsorstrasse. I think that that one was not but that all the others were.

CB Up to that time, were you aware of the synagogue becoming increasingly important in a cultural sense?

HS No! You mean as a center?

CB I mean as a center of Jewish cultural activity because Jewish performing artists, musicians and so forth weren't allowed to perform elsewhere.

HS We had our own "Kulturbund" - our own cultural activity in Berlin. We had our own plays, music, concerts, etc.

That was not connected with a synagogue. It was connected with the Jewish community - with the "Judische Kulturgemeinde", with a Jewish Community Center. It was quite lively, I would say, for awhile - the Jewish Culture was.

CB Did that cease after Kristallnacht, do you recall?

HS No, I don't think so! It ceased with the war, of course!

CB Now there was never any attempt in Berlin to "ghettoize" the Jews? (i.e., force them to live in one section, possibly a walled section?)

HS No.

CB Not even after Kristallnacht? So your family did not have to give up its apartment?

HS We didn't have an apartment anymore. We gave up our apartment, I think, when my father lost his job. My parents lived with one family. Again, with apartments, you had a choice. There were other people living there. Apartments were there. They threw you out of apartments. They repossessed a lot of apartments. If you had an apartment you took other people in. There was nothing anymore like privacy! I stayed with other people again, with Friedlaender. After 1938 there was

no way to buy an apartment.

CB The Kaminsky firm was allowed to continue to operate after Kristallnacht?

HS I think they left. The Kaminskys left.

CB Were they Polish, by any chance?

HS I don't think so! They must have been originally. I know she was not. I don't think that they were Polish. No, they were not thrown out with the Polish people. No, they left. I think they went to the 'States. They emigrated normally.

CB Were a lot of your friends in Berlin emigrating - that is, in your particular circle - not casual acquaintances but within your circle?

HS Oh, yes! Oh, yes!

CB Did the thought ever cross your mind? (the thought of emigrating?)

HS Oh, very much so! Extremely! Much more so than it did to my parents. You see, when my parents started to find out that things were going from bad to worse, it was really too late for them. We had visas for Ecuador. We

had booked passage already - and very shortly before we were to go, maybe a month or so, they cancelled all the visas for Ecuador.

CB The Ecuadorian Government cancelled the visas?

HS I suppose so! I don't know whether these visas were on the up-and-up or whether somebody in the Ecuadorian consulate made a little bakshish with the visas (was bribed to give them). Truthfully, I don't know exactly how it was. I know that we took Spanish lessons. I just can't remember. I really don't know whether it was in '38, '39, '37 - most of it was in '38. Most of these things took place between '38 and the onset of the war, the beginning of the war. It was around '39. I know that I made the rounds of the consulates and that I didn't get anywhere, of course. Then, I wanted to go to Shanghai (China). You know, there was the overland route. You could go on the overland route through Russia and the Siberian Express to Shanghai. After the war started in 1939, I wanted to go to Shanghai. (Visas to China were being sold.) We had a relative - Mother had a relative who was once there. Again, it's unbelievable how stupid we really were. I was very inexperienced. I had led a very sheltered life - to a certain degree, and I was woefully inexperienced, you know. I was completely unprepared, normally, for life. I mean, I had to find a way only because I was thrown out into it, and it was sink or swim. We had a relative who was

once a German Consul in Tientsin, of all places, and we met with him and he told us all the horrible difficulties one would face going to Shanghai - mostly that it's hot and people are poor, and there is no money, and all these things. I don't know if my going to Shanghai would have been a very ideal solution because the Japanese came in after a short time, but it would probably have been better than what happened. I had an uncle in London. Now, he, unfortunately, never became a British subject (that was not easy to do in post W.W. I), because, at that time, he was traveling a lot for his business and the tax situation was better for him. He did not become a British subject. He never became one. So, the first thing, when the war started, he was interned in England. They didn't care if he was a Jew or not a Jew. All the Germans went into the camps. Anyway, he was able to arrange something for me. I think that I paid 200 pounds. At that time, we didn't have very much money left. There wasn't much money around the place, really none, but for the 200 pounds which I could get and go to England and become a cook's apprentice. For 200 pounds I could become a cook's apprentice at the College Kitchen in Cambridge. Somehow we were able to manage it. The 200 pounds was a lot of money then! 200 pounds - when you don't have any money!

CH A thousand dollars?

HS A thousand dollars! A thousand dollars in 1939 - it just didn't lie around. Somehow we figured out that we had some things to sell. Somehow we made it possible, and I applied for it and I was accepted, but this was in the late summer of 1939, and then the war came. In September, the war came and there I was. We tried the 'States and everybody we wrote to - and we had relatives here in those days - they said they gave so many affidavits already, it's impossible - "Love to help, but we just can't do it", they said.

CB It sounds as if you left no stone unturned in trying to leave.

HS Well, I would have done more if I had known what I know today. Another thing, just shortly before we left, somebody - it was Dr. Husserl again, discovered a man who should have been able to get us over the border to Switzerland - illegally to Switzerland. The only trouble was that we started to pay something - I guess the 200 pounds we didn't have to pay for England. After we payed him, he disappeared - he was a swindler. So, we did try, I guess. It was just too damn late. It was too late and too little!

CB Approximately how long after Kristallnacht did you affiliate with Jabotinsky (Vladimir Jabotinsky, born in Russia in 1880, died in Palestine in 1940 and started a group dedicated to terrorism by the assassination of

British in Palestine)?

HS Kaminsky?

CB No, not the firm - the Jewish leader, Jabotinsky.

HS Jabotinsky? No, he was not alive anymore at that time.
The organization he founded was Betar, spelled:
"b-e-t-a-r". The Betar was a Nationalistic - Jewish
Nationalistic Youth organization.

CB How long after Kristallnacht did you affiliate with
that?

HS I have no knowledge of that.

CB Who was Jabotinsky?

HS Jabotinsky was a leader - he was a Jewish leader - a
Nationalistic-Jewish leader in Palestine, who wanted a
Jewish State. We did not look for a Jewish homeland,
but he was the one who wanted the Jewish State.

CB Was he associated with Betar?

HS He was the founder of it!

CB Had he come back to Germany to organize Betar?

HS Betar? No! No! He was dead by then (that information was wrong). There were other organizers. But the Betar was a party. Look, you know, if you get three Jews together you'll have four parties. They are very politicized. Jews are very politicized. This was just a party - it was a movement. I was completely ignorant, as far as politics go. How I got in there I have no idea. I was a complete idiot. I had not the remotest idea of Zionist politics, party politics, you know.

CB But it was Betar which sponsored the farm work...

HS Right. (Actually, many Zionist organizations, other than Betar did the same - it was the Zionist dream.)

CB Alright! Now, where was the farm?

HS Oh, around the land somewhere. In the country.

CB Owned by Jews?

HS No! Not necessarily!

CB Gentiles, sympathetic to Jews?

HS I don't know whether they were sympathetic, but if they found people who were working for nothing - willing to work for nothing while they learned...

CB Oh, I see!

HS It's easy to be sympathetic.

CB I thought from the way you had mentioned it before... I thought maybe it was some experimental farming?

HS It might have been. I have no idea. I really do not remember. This is another very hazy area for recollections.

CB When was it, approximately, that you started being impressed into the various work gangs to work at this factory, or at that shop, or in the railway yards, or such?

HS At the beginning of the war.

CB Would you say that was the same for your father, too - about the beginning of the war?

HS Yes! I think so, yes.

CB Now, let me ask you a question about these work gangs that has somewhat intrigued me, as I've read about them and heard other people talk about them. Was there any sort of logic in where you were placed and when and why

you were moved from one factory to another?

HS None whatsoever! Not any more than when linguists are sent to mechanics school in the Army. Not any more than that. There was absolutely none!

CB Was your whole gang - your whole group moved - or were individuals pulled out?

HS There were no "gangs". This was strictly individual - on an individual basis that you were assigned!

CB How were these orders transmitted? You would just show up at work at the railway yards to unload?

HS I think that's right! They would just give you a slip, I suppose, and they'd send you back.

CB Telling you to go some place?

HS Telling you to go to a labor exchange. From there, they would send you to another place. There weren't many exchanges. You see, there was one thing - everything was legal - everything was organized - there was nothing left to chance. It was ill-organized many times and it was crazy how things were done, but everything went according to the letter of the law - according to organization. I was not treated in any other way than other occasional laborers would be treated, I think. It

wasn't a particular thing for Jews to go to be transferred. There was one labor exchange.

CH Oh, I see! So it was not just Jews with whom you were working who would go from one place to another?

HS No!

CH It was the German Proletariat - the German work force and you were just forced to mingle.

HS That's right. Of course, there were a lot of Jews in certain places. They sent a lot of Jews to these places, and I think that there were mostly Jews, as I remember.

CB Are you saying that you were never mistreated in these work gangs - in these work places - because you were a Jew?

HS I would say that. Yes, I would say that!

CH You never worked under a rabid anti-Semite who was out to harass and mistreat you?

HS No, I have no recollection of it! Let's put it this way - I have no recollection of it. I did not enjoy the work per se, I mean, it was pretty damn hard work many

times. We had a very hard winter. I think it was the winter of 1940 - or was it 1941? I think that it was '41. Yes, it was the winter of 1941. It was during the Russian counter-offensive. It was an extremely hard winter. We had 40 degrees below zero in Berlin. This was the only time I remember "40 degrees below zero". It was something quite extraordinary. I worked outside. I did some yard work with other people. I think that they were Jews mostly, but it was very cold, and I remember we worked for ten minutes and then we would sit for half an hour inside in a hut, around a stove. Nobody really bothered you. They didn't chase you out with a whip.

CB Moving out in society and on the streets, did you ever feel frightened? Insecure? Did you ever have any run-ins with the Gestapo in this period? (GESTAPO stands for "Geheime Stats Polizei" translated into Secret State Police.)

HS No, no!

CB Did you always carry your papers with you? (In Europe people carried identity papers.)

HS Oh, yes! You have a sort Kennkarte, which is the identification card with a "J" on it and "Heinz Israel Stieber" so there was no doubt about it. You carry it with you always. Everybody had to carry identity papers

anyhow. Insecure? Of course I felt insecure, but in the street you had to be careful when you carried a book! You had to be careful not to carry a book this way, for then they would think it was to cover the star!

CB You were never stopped and submitted to insults?

HS No! No!

CB Marched in the streets or such?

HS No! No, no, never. To tell you the truth, I have still a certain amount of respect for the Berliners. They were the only people - later wherever I was in Vienna, in Hungary, wherever I was - I found much more anti-Semitism.

CB What about food during this period? How did you get food?

HS That was difficult. Food was very, very difficult. You had to have (ration) coupons, of course. I suppose I got some coupons on the black market at times or there were certain places - there were certain restaurants - where you could go in and eat without them - without coupons. It was difficult. I mean it took quite a bit of doing - of thinking about it. Of course there were still things to buy, such as fruit and certain things.

You couldn't buy meat or bread. There were certain things you could buy, at times, but rarely. You had to have coupons for really everything. Again, this is a strange thing, as I am thinking about it. I know you had to have coupons and I know I couldn't get coupons and I know I had them. I don't know how I got them. I just got them. I don't remember that I was ever satisfied as far as eating was concerned, but I don't think I ever suffered malnutrition - at least not at that time.

CB By this time, had you lost contact with your Gentile friends?

HS Yes!

CB Was that simply because of the schedules you were following or where you lived? Or because they were beginning to shun you or what?

HS They shunned me! Oh, yes, very much so. I remember especially one of all persons - an Armenian. His parents were refugees from the Turks! In Berlin they had a wholesale drug business, that is, his father did. I was very friendly with them. He was a nice young fellow. He was very popular with my parents, I remember, and we were together quite a bit. One day he called me and he said, "Please don't call me anymore" or something like that. You see, these were people who had similar experiences.

CB It taught them no sympathy!

HS I only hope I never find a Jew who would do the same thing. I'm afraid there were (Jews who did the same thing).

CB What about pay for the work you were doing? Was there any discrimination in pay? Did you get paid the same as anybody - a Gentile - in the work force?

HS I think so. I'm not sure, but I think so.

CB Do you have any idea what it was - what rate? I am sure it depended upon the job, but was it so low that it was ridiculous, or was it adequate for your situation?

HS I think that it was adequate. I think that it was the regular pay which they paid for a worker in those days. It was not the very best, anyhow, wherever you went.

CB Now you were living separately from your parents?

HS Yes.

CB How often did you see them? Once - twice - three times a week?

HS I am not sure.

CB Were you living close by?

HS You could walk it. It was maybe a twenty minutes walk.

CB Did you perceive that they were suffering greatly, mentally, as well as physically, or were they in a sense, taking it in stride and trying to adapt?

HS No. I think that they were suffering quite considerably. I don't think they were taking it in stride at all.

CB Some of these questions are painful for me to ask and it may sound ridiculous the way I am asking them.

HS No! No. They're not ridiculous. It is just that they are difficult to answer at times.

CB See, what I had in mind was, was your father able to adapt more readily than your mother or was it your mother?

HS Oh, my mother was really the more adaptable of the two, I would think. Of course, my mother was quite a bit... she, my mother, was 16 years younger than my father. That, I think, makes quite a difference. My father, in 1942, was 64 years old, so that's quite a difference.

And my mother was 48.

CB Was your mother sent into the work force?

HS No. Women were not - that was a general rule, at that time. But, at that time, Germany was still winning the war, you know. (Other survivors from Berlin experienced women in the work force.)

CB Could you say approximately how long you would last on one job before you would move, on the average? Would it be a week at this job and a week at another job? Or would it be two, three, or four months at one job?

HS I tell you that I would stay the shortest time possible. I never put myself out, particularly, you know. It depended. A couple of months or so, I think. They usually got tired of me, you know.

CB Could you be sick and lay-off?

HS Yes.

CB You had some sick time?

HS This is one thing I worked out quite a bit: sickness, in order to get off. You had to go to a company doctor. He would give you a certificate and you could stay home

for three days or a week or whatever, and I worked this to the hilt - the sickness bit, I mean.

CB But were you in fairly good health or were you indeed OK?

HS I was in fairly good health. I think that I had a little bit of trouble with my gall bladder at that time. That wasn't very much, but with it, I think that I did as much with it as I possible could. No, I was in fairly good health, but I tried everything possible. Oh, yes, I remember that I was at the doctor every time I could. You even got paid something when you were sick, I remember. Everything was completely legal, but the time that you were in the work force you were working and you were like any other worker. You were treated like any other worker. I mean, of course, you had the lousiest jobs which were available, but you still, as far as I remember, were paid the same way and you were treated the same way and you could get sick the same way and I don't think there was a difference.

CB Were you dating a girl at this time? Was there any time left for that kind of thing? Was there any place to go?

HS There was for a very short time, I would say. Then she left, too. She left. She went to the States and I don't, I just don't think that my interest was at all with female companionship at that time.

CB The day that you decided to leave the paint factory, you just simply walked off the job?

HS Just walked off the job and walked straight out the gate.

CB Who was this Dr. Husserl? Was he Jewish?

HS Dr. Husserl? Yes, he was Jewish. he went to Switzerland eventually. He got out of Switzerland and he died in Australia.

CB Do you have any idea how he had a connection with the Gestapo?

HS He had very good connections! He was a prominent lawyer and he had a great amount of connections. He knew everybody in the city, and so he knew a lot of Gestapo people, too. There were a lot of lawyers, a lot of intellectuals who went into the Gestapo. They couldn't make a go in private practice. This was a godsend opportunity - to sit in an office - for many of these people that was just it. They just wanted to sit in an office, you know.

CB Did you ever have contact with him after the war?

HS Yes. I met him again in Vienna after the war and in Switzerland, too. First, I met him in Switzerland, then in Vienna.

CB And did you ever inquire how he knew at that moment that you were perhaps on the verge of being arrested? Did you ever probe that?

HS I don't think so. I don't remember. Somehow, immediately after the war, I think that your interest and my interest in these things was much less than it became later. Right after the war and for quite a while, all one's thinking really was taken up with a tremendous feeling that "I can get off a chair and walk out the door and nobody is going to stop me and I can do what I want". This was the greatest thing after the war - for a long time, there was nothing else. Just that you could get up and leave whenever you wanted. It took a long time to get used to that and that you don't have to look right or left.

CB Worry about who's hiding in the doorway or lurking in the shadows?

HS Yes.

CB I think I've kept you overly long today, and I'll terminate it here. This is a convenient stopping place.

(end of second interview)

CB This is the third interview session with Mr. Henry Steeber in the living room of his home, and it is February 15, 1979. Mr. Steeber, at the end of the last interview, we were talking about your leaving Berlin in the summer of '42 and going to Vienna. I don't think we really dealt with reasons why you did decide. You had left Berlin very hurriedly on the advice of the lawyer, Husserl and took a train to go to Vienna. You took a local that took about 48 hours to get to Vienna; but I don't think you mentioned the reason why you chose Vienna. I am sure your choices were limited in the first place.

HS Well, this was the only place - the only area where I knew people, besides Berlin. You know, I was still a little bit naive, maybe, and during that time, considered it possible that some people would help me. I could not really do it - survive - without other people - without people's help. I had no identification. I had none of these little things which were necessary to prove that you existed at that time, and so, you know, it was a logical choice to me.

CB What did you do when you got into Vienna by train?

HS You know it's a funny thing, because I was thinking

about it the other day, and I am not completely clear anymore exactly what I did. I have no recollection of even arriving in Vienna. I don't remember where, which station of the various railroad stations - I have no idea anymore. I think, and it seems to me I really would not know why, but of course I had known them for a while - I went to one of the people who worked in my parents' home, when we lived in Vienna, before we moved to Berlin, my parents had a cook and a chambermaid, both of whom were taken over from my grandparents, you know - they worked for my grandparents. The chambermaid had a sister who came in from time to time as a seamstress. They lived together, but I don't know, I think the maid part of that sister team was dead by that time, if I'm not mistaken. I think that I went there. They were close, really, very close people to me, really. I went to see them. They had a little apartment in a very working class district, and I think I spent a night there. I don't think that they encouraged me to stay. It was very dangerous to have a Jew staying. I mean this was not a laughing matter, at that time. I was the enemy. The next stop I remember was that I went to the "Burgenland" to Parendorf, where my uncle's family had a farm. My uncle (my mother's brother) lived in London and he married, after the first World War, a girl from Parendorf. She was, of course, not a Jew. She had been his nurse. He was wounded during the war - during W.W. I, or maybe he was sick or something and she nursed him. She was the nurse at the army hospital. For some

reason or another, some good reason or no good reason, I don't know, he married her and she had her family living in Parendorf. So this was the closest thing I had to family. I went down to Parendorf. They had a very big farm. The farm was close to the Hungarian border. The reception I got there was not particularly cordial. As a matter of fact, but I only learned that later, after the war, I heard that there were discussions whether they should call the police or not. This was the family.

CB Your aunt was not there?

HS My aunt was not there. She was in London! She got herself interned in London and then she got out.

CB So this was a Gentile family?

HS Yes! Very much so. Then I went back to Vienna and I looked up friends with whom I stayed the first summer I came from Berlin in 1936, in Weitenerke, you know? (The earlier reference was to Vachau, but many towns had more than one name due to boundary changes.) That was when I went to school. I told you I stayed with some friends. I looked them up. Somehow, again, I got to a family where the wife was the concierge, the porter, the Hausmeister, of a building in Vienna in the seventh district. That was a mixed marriage, too. The husband

was a Jew and he didn't even live in the building. He lived somewhere else, but they were still married. It was not that they had split up, but for safety's sake he moved to another place. She worked there. She had a job there as a concierge and they had a son, too. They had, besides their place in front of the building, the housemaster's apartment, which you have as you come into the front door of the house - they had another room in the back part of the house. You went through a courtyard and there was another part of the house - of the apartment. ^{building} They had a very large room in the back. That's where I stayed. People didn't know that it belonged to them, or probably even that it was there. That's where I stayed from, I would say it was February or March, something like this, I guess. What am I talking about - February or March? It was 1942. It was June, 1942, that I went to Vienna. I'm thinking about when I went to Hungary. It was from June of 1942 until January or February of 1944.

CB In essence you were in hiding then? Is that right?

HS Yes!

CB Did you go out?

HS Oh, yes. I went out! Through the son we had a fairly safe circle of people. We saw each other and we had

some visits. We had no "underground" as such in Vienna. Nobody can tell you that there was one. Not in 1940, not in 1942, was there an "underground". There was nothing! But there were some people who had a certain connection with the service, with the supposedly British secret service and there was a chain of information. Even though it was very loose, it existed. That the people didn't get caught was a miracle. It shows how inept the police or the Gestapo in Vienna really was. But we did it (exchange information) in coffee houses and we didn't really think about it! I did various jobs. I remember that there was one chap who had a studio. There was not very much to be had. You couldn't buy very much in Vienna during the war, but one thing we could get was ceramic. Ceramic! They always found ceramic earth and they always could make plates and urns and such things; so this was a going concern there.

(Continued on Tape 2, Side 4)

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY OF HENRY STEEBER

HS It was one of the few things people could spend money on. I was sitting there, I remember, in the studio where we made plates - ceramic plates. They had to be decorated. Little flowers had to be painted on them.

CB This is the second part of the third interview. You were sitting there with your friend.

HS Yes, and I was painting little flowers on plates, and when they had a big order, I was sitting there, thirty-six hours in a row, painting little flowers on plates. And we would go with a little hand cart and deliver them to whatever dealer or whoever ordered them. As you see, I moved fairly freely in the city. By that time people really had other worries. The first bloom of the joy of Anschluss was over and many people had second and third thoughts in Vienna, especially. They were not quite that eager anymore to sniffle around (meaning investigate on their own) too much. I sold cigarettes on the black market and saccharine in the black market and wine in the black market and anything which could be obtained, which could be smuggled in or out. This is what we did to make a living.

CB Was that dangerous? Was the black market operated sort of openly?

HS No. There was a little, maybe, added danger, but the added danger was really very minimal. My main danger was to be around. I think the added danger was to be more visible, maybe - to be more exposed, but to tell you the truth, it was fairly easy to move around if you had the nerve to do it. I had some narrow escapes. Fortunately, as a student of the school about which I told you, the "Graphische Lehr and Versuchsanstalt", I had an identification card, a Kenn Karte, on which is stamped the year, etc. during which you enrolled. Everybody had to have identification and everything, of course. It was not valid anymore in 1942, since I got thrown out in 1938. That friend again I told you about, his name was Gustav Frei, the fellow from Weiteneck, he was a very good artist. He was an amateur, but a very good artist, a very good craftsman, a good painter, a collector. I bought two things from him, this card, plus, I had another one which I acquired from somebody and an identification card, a Kenn Karte which was the main identification which everybody had to carry. Now, of course, I couldn't carry one. Living underground, I didn't have one, but I acquired one from the son of the people I lived with. And it so happened they were not Austrians, they were Czechs originally and so his identification card was with - what was it in Czech? Yes, the name which was the official title then, so that was a little advantage already, you know, because we were conspicuous already in Vienna. So he gave me

his and he said he lost his. Now, I took both of them at different times because I gave the one to this Gustav Frei and he forged both of the cards. He painted stamps on them and he extended the validity of the school identification until 42, I think, so I had something in my hand. Later he replaced the picture of the original owner with my picture. He did it very well and painted a stamp and everything. He painted the stamp in blue ink and it looked good; if you didn't look too closely it was a very good - it was a very good job. So once again, I think I was fortunate - you will laugh if I tell you that I met up with somebody else, an old family friend. I met her in Vienna. She, a woman, she also lived underground. Both of us, we knew the former wife of Richard Spescht, Wanda Spescht. I told you about Richard Spescht? I mentioned him once. We visited with her sometimes. She was a very strange woman, a very strange woman. I think she "flipped her wig" or whatever and I think that she denounced us to the Gestapo one day. I know that we met in a certain place, in a little coffee shop.

CB You and the old family friend and...this lady.

HS No, no, no! The old family friend. We got out of the shop at different times and she got arrested. I got out and I got around the corner and I was stopped. I wasn't together with her. I was stopped by a young

fellow, a young punk. Young punks, at that time, would stop you for nothing, so I had to think fast. At that time I got my school card out. At that time I could speak very nice Viennese dialect. They let me go and I got on a street car and I got away. I thought about it hard and I don't know what story I told them. There were other fairly narrow escapes. The one I mentioned before which really made me decide to leave Germany was that the Gestapo was right in the building where I lived, looking for me. I came down from my room. They could have had a big sign around their necks reading "Gestapo!" They dressed in long leather coats - long, black leather coats. If you saw them, there was no doubt who they were! It was a mixed house, offices and apartments with a sign there with the names of the tenants on it, the commercial tenants on it, and I went up to one of these people and said, "Could you tell me whether Schmeiker-Uber has a pottery factory here?" He growled at me, "Look up there!" So I looked up there and said "Doesn't live here!" and walked off. That was a close call. If I wouldn't have come down out of the room just in time, I don't know what would have happened, so I decided that the better part of valor and all that would be to try to get out and make contact with some people who took people over the border to Hungary.

CB Now before we go into that story, may I ask you a few questions about Vienna? Do you know whatever happened

to the concierge?

HS Yes. She got to Buchenwald, rather, to Bergen-Belsen, eventually. She got arrested eventually. The son got out of it. Nothing happened to the son, but she got to Bergen-Belsen (both Buchenwald & Bergen-Belsen were German concentration camps.)

CB She was a Gentile?

HS Yes.

CB What about her husband? Do you know about him?

HS Her husband... I heard he died naturally. He was a very sick man to start with.

CB Did she survive Bergen-Belsen?

HS No! She did not. She had somebody else. It's a complicated story. Her son had a girlfriend from Poland, a non-Jewish girlfriend. She always came with the son. She was a good bit older than he was and she, in turn, had a friend, the son of a friend or something, a young man, a Jew from Poland. She brought him in sometimes and he stayed. I guess that something went wrong with him - things went sour with him. Then things exploded. It was very hard, after the war, to find out exactly what happened to people.

There were too many different stories. The only fact I could find out was that one day she was arrested, but why and how, I don't know. What I heard was that it was a neighbor who denounced her to the Gestapo and I know who it was. All I could do was that I went to the police later and told them what I knew about this. A fellow, to the best of my knowledge, was the one who was instrumental in getting her arrested. That is all that I or anyone really could do. Now there was not a great rush after the war to do anything. You couldn't depend on anything. Of course, much of the police was Communist. They would want to show their mettle, and they would rush out and do silly things, but on the other hand, let's face it, much of the police was in the same boat. They were the same Nazis that the others were. Of course, nobody was a Nazi after the war, but that's beside the point.

CB Why did you make the contact with Wanda Spescht?

HS Why?

CB Yes, she was Gentile?

HS Oh, sure.

CB Did you think she was a trusted friend?

HS I suppose so. More of my friend, truly a trusted

friend of my friend, than of my own. Of course, I knew her. She was a friend of my mother.

CB What ever happened to her?

HS I don't know. I will tell you the truth - I really didn't care. I didn't go out for vengeance - for looking up people. I just didn't care enough, unfortunately.

CB This year-and-a-half that you were in Vienna, did you range rather widely through the city or did you stick very closely to your neighborhood?

HS No, I don't think that I restricted myself in any way. Naturally, there were certain areas which I frequented more than others. I was mostly in the seventh district and the eighth district (talking about residential parts of Vienna) and the center of the city (the inner Stadt) rather than other parts of city. I would normally do this in any city. There were many parts I never got to, but I normally would have never gotten to.

CB Well, I was thinking about your black market activities. Did that require you to travel around the city considerably?

HS Oh no! No! That was mostly like broker stuff, you

know, you bought it from one and you sold it to another. It was a middleman type of thing, you know.' The cigarettes were smuggled in from Bulgaria - mainly from Bulgaria. There were a lot of Bulgarian cigarettes - some were also from Yugoslavia. The saccharine went out the same way - most to Yugoslavia and to the Balkan countries. The trading went to the Balkan countries and from the Balkans. It was the easiest way. (The Nazi occupation of Bulgaria was accepted on February 14, 1941. Yugoslavia was conquered by the Nazis on March 27, 1941 to April 17, 1941.)

CB You may not think that this is terribly important, but I'm curious about the black market. I've heard several people say that for a time or for awhile they survived by engaging in black market activities. Could you elaborate a little bit about how you made the contacts and some of the kinds of business dealings you made? Do you recall prices paid? You see, again, I'm thinking of a hundred years from now, when someone might listen to this tape.

HS I appreciate this. Unfortunately again, I don't remember. I think that I would make a lousy witness, for I think my memory is really too selective. Now, I remember the cigarettes. I remember the packages they came in. I remember how we prepared the saccharine, which was quite dishonest, but we got away with it.

You see saccharine is cut with bicarbonate soda - the pure saccharine is. What we did was what they did with gold files: you know, we put a little bit on top to hide the saccharine. There was a lot of bicarbonate of soda and very little saccharine. I mean, it was mixed, but the top layer was the real thing - but the deeper down you got, the worse it got. There were no ethics in this thing, in this business. If you got away with it, you got away with it. We sold wine which we brought in from I don't know where. I guess also from Yugoslavia and little Dalmatia. We had a good business with bordellos in town. We sold them wine. Bordellos were legal at that time. It was a business where everybody cut himself in, if possible. You heard something, such as these people want a hundred thousand cigarettes, so you found somebody and sometimes they would go through a couple of middlemen until you got the cigarettes. Sometimes you didn't ever see the cigarettes when they were delivered, but you got a cut.

CB It sounds as if you were working in a team arrangement, not that you were an independent agent.

HS I was an independent agent. I mean that everyone was relying on other people also. I mean, I did not go to Bulgaria to pick up cigarettes and bring them to Vienna, of course. You bought them together at times or I would sometimes have some stock in cigarettes or

in saccharine and so on. Of course, the less stock the better and to hold it as short as possible.

CB You didn't want a big inventory?

HS I liked no inventory. I didn't want any inventory. I didn't have the space for inventory. It was impossible to store. I would think that it was done in a small way - on the same basis as any mob would do business here in drugs.

CB What about income derived from the black market? Was it adequate for subsistence or did you go for periods without funds?

HS I was never very flush, but again, I don't think that money, at that time, was crucial. There was a lot of money around to be had, but you could not buy anything, so money was not of great importance. The important stuff was food. Where do you get food? Strangely enough, I don't know, but I must have had a source. Again, I can't remember. I must have had a source for food. I probably bought it for money with fake food coupons. I went to restaurants. There were some restaurants that would give you something without coupons, but in most of them you needed some food coupons. There was a vegetarian restaurant where I ate a lot of times and there were other places also. I went to some fairly good restaurants regularly, so I

must have had some money.

CB Would you say that the black market was appealing mostly to Jews who were in hiding.

HS Oh, no! No! No!

CB A lot of people, Gentiles also, were engaged in the black market?

HS But of course! But of course!

CB I didn't mean that in any sort of derogatory way. I wondered if some Jews in Vienna had particularly gone into black market operations as a means of livelihood simply because there was nothing else left to earn their living with.

HS I didn't know any other Jews. I didn't know any Jews. There were some half Jews in the group, you know, "Mischlinge?" They were still in Vienna legally. I was the only one I knew, except for this other chap, the one I talked about who was in that situation. Oh, there was nobody else around. This was not a group of people living underground who got involved in the black market.

CB You never had a second thought about maybe flirting with the devil because the black market activity would

force you out into the open?

HS What was the alternative?

CB You were in hiding and being totally reliant on other people, I suppose.

HS What do you mean? Who's going to feed you? Nobody was interested in feeding you. I wouldn't have gotten away - I wouldn't have gotten a bite to eat.

CB Now that's another question I wanted to ask you. What sort of arrangement did you have with the Concierge? Did you pay any sort of rent? Did she at times supply you with food?

HS Yes, Yes! She was very good, very decent, very, very decent. There was no question about it - yes. She was not at all mercenary. She didn't do it at all from mercenary considerations. I suppose I paid her when I could. If I didn't have money, I'm quite sure I ate there without any money. If there was any food, or whatever there was, I shared with them. There was no commercial feeling involved. They were strictly humanitarians.

CB Let me ask you another very broad question. You may not see the reason for it, but I do have a reason. Would you say, since you mentioned commercial

considerations, that commercial considerations generally dominated people's motives in a situation like this? Or did you see human kindness and moral considerations keep coming through?

HS Yes, I'll tell you why. Nobody could have paid for the risk people took. How much can you pay somebody if you said, "Hide me!" and if they found out, the person is fairly certain to get killed? How much do you want to pay for that, or can you pay for that?

CB It's frequently said, and I'm sure you've heard it and I'm sure you've seen it in print, "In tense situations like this, if you've got the money and if the deal can be made and if the price is right, you can find a place for hiding! You can find somebody who will look after you, but only if you have the money!"

HS May I tell you something, I don't know of any case that people were hidden during the war only for money. I don't know of any case. I don't say that there might not have been any...

CB But you have seen that in print?

HS I have not.

CB I have.

HS I have not!

CB Yes, I have.

HS I'm sure you have. I have no personal knowledge of it. I will say that my feeling today is, for there is no knowledge involved, really, based on what I heard and what I observed, if somebody was hidden, he/she was hidden in most cases due to the conviction of the hider (person providing the concealment) and because of the convictions only!

CB I'm going to switch the sides of the tape again. Now, the summer or early 1944, when you decided to leave; you say that there was a close call that made you come to the conviction that you had to get out of Vienna.

HS Let me go back for a moment about how people risked their lives.

CB Yes, I think that's important.

HS It is like today - if you tell people that they are going to die the day after tomorrow if they don't stop smoking, they'll still smoke. Am I right? So it was the same way then, in a way. If somebody was convinced of what they are doing, they would do it. It was a capital offense to listen to foreign broadcasts. Still, people, and I among them, were

sitting every night and waiting for the "ta-ta-ta-tum" and the "this is London" and the whole thing, and they all would listen to the whole thing on BBC (the British Broadcasting Corporation) every night. So you can see that the threat of being made a head shorter didn't keep anybody from it. Anybody who wanted to "listen to England" - you needed these things! If you were anti-Nazi, anti-German, you needed these broadcasts to keep going. This was more necessary than bread or potatoes. The daily doses of BBC were what you needed to keep up your morale. It was completely demoralizing - the newspapers, the constantly repeated claims, the repeating of everything you despised until you started to believe it yourself. So the BBC was a very, very important antidote. This is the same way if somebody was convinced that what they were doing was right, they will do it. I don't think that today, even today, the death penalty keeps anybody from doing what they really want. It's the same thing, you know, the same thing!

CB You said that you made contact with some people or some agencies that would get refugees into Hungary. What made you decide to go to Hungary in the first place? Was it the only option?

HS There were no options, really. What was there?
Hungary was the only country which was not occupied by

the Germans at that time. It was pro-fascist, but it wasn't pro-Nazi anyway. So it was not occupied. It was the only country. (On April 12, 1941, Hungary entered the war, but the Jews from Hungary were not sent to Auschwitz until November 19, 1944.)

CB Did you realize that up to that point, the Jews in Hungary had not been greatly persecuted in comparison to elsewhere?

HS Sure.

CB How did you know that? Through BBC broadcasts? Through people traveling back and forth?

HS Yes, I would think so. There was contact, I didn't live in a vacuum. I knew a lot of things. You had contact with people and people traveled. We were in the black market. Probably the black market broadens. I don't know.

CB How did you make contact with the people who were going to get you into Hungary once the decision was made for you to go to Hungary?

HS Through somebody else again - through the son of the Concierge, the one I lived with. I think he brought me together with them for some consideration. I don't remember what it was. They would take you to a jump-

off point somewhere in the Burgenland, which is at the Hungarian border. Then they take you over the fields and they pick you up on the other side and take you to Budapest. Another reason I wanted to go, but again it was just an added advantage because I would have gone anyhow, was that I had, again, friends of my parents in Budapest. Burbash was their name. They had a store - a little general clothing store or department store.

CB Were they Jews?

HS They were Jews, yes, Jews! Modernized Jews. They had a little department store - you know, like we were discussing. So, at least there was somebody again to talk to at the time. I had a suitcase which was stolen on the way from Vienna to Budapest. It was a rather arduous walk, across the fields during the night.

CB Was part of the trip by train?

HS Yes! It was the train to the place where the jump off point was. Then we went across and stayed overnight, and as I remember in some barn. There I lost the suitcase and acquired lice. Then they picked us up - I think with horse drawn wagons.

CB Were you alone or were there several of you?

HS There were several. There were a lot of people along.
There were several - how many, I don't remember -
anybody from there.

CB They weren't friends of yours? They were not in your
circle of acquaintances?

HS No, I didn't know anybody. It was a very foggy
experience for me again - very, very foggy. But, I
remember that it was in the winter. It was cold. I
remember the train - they kept us in a compartment
somewhere, but I don't remember where. There was
something where we had to stay in one place for a
while and eventually they got us out and we started
walking, and I remember very, very little about it.

CB This was in January or February of 1943?

HS I think it was February, if I'm not mistaken.
Oh, I said February, so it must have been February.

CB Your destination was Budapest?

HS Yes. I got to Budapest alright.

CB Then what? You looked up your friends?

Hj Yes. I looked up my friends. They said, "Look there's

only one way in which we can help you. You cannot live here illegally. It is too difficult and much too dangerous. If they find you, they will send you back. It's no good! If you go to the KAOP (the KAOP was the police for foreigners) and let yourself be known and tell them that you just came in illegally, they will intern you. There were a number of camps in Budapest, Hungary (two or three at that time), for the people who came from Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia. There were alot of people coming in and Hungary was relatively free.

CB At the moment, it seemed to be a haven?

HS I remember Burbash sent me with one of his people to walk over to the police. During that walk, I saw that they had so many things which I hadn't seen in the stores in years. They had all the food you wanted and most of the goods you wanted. The confectionaries! It was just a miracle for me to walk through it. We stopped somewhere just to eat something. This was the biggest experience up to that time. So, I went to the police and I was interned and everything seemed to be alright. These camps were not particularly a pleasure, but not too bad. Burbash sent me packages, fortunately. They were very nice. They sent me packages with some clothing and some food, so I didn't do too badly for the first couple of weeks I was there. I got rid of my lice. I think this was a most

frustrating experience. They said, "You have to get deloused," I said, "Lice? I don't have lice," but they said, "What do you mean you don't have lice? They're crawling all over you!" It really became one of daily chores to sit and you look in the seams - you look for lice in every crack. The camp was in the Jewish section of Budapest. You couldn't get out, at least I don't think you could get out. Maybe once in awhile there was somebody who could go somewhere, but I am not sure.

CB Were the Hungarian police courteous or rough?

HS The first contact I had when I went there, they were very courteous. They must have been courteous, for they didn't have any inclination to do anything. Now these camps were actually run by the Jewish community under the auspices of the government, that is, these internment camps, so there was no pressure there, of course. You could send out for things if you wanted to. If you wanted something else to eat, you could send out for it. It was really as loosely run as they could possibly get away with. But after I was there, for about two weeks or so, I was transferred to a camp which was not run by the Jewish community anymore, but the Hungarian government - the Hungarian police, in Csórgo. Csórgo is a small place which was in Hungary at that time. Before that it was Czechoslovakia and now I guess it's Czechoslovakia again. It is near

Satoraljaujhely (located 48.24N, 21.40E) - don't try to spell it, for heaven's sake. Satoraljaujhely is a district town in North East Hungary. Csorgo was again a camp which was surrounded by nothing and run by the police, but not in a sadistic way in any way. Actually, the only bad thing was there was nothing to do - there was absolutely nothing to do. You could buy some additional foods, I remember, if you wanted to. Food was at a minimum, but there were some people who got food in, even a lot of people from, the border areas from Yugoslavia and the border areas from Rumania - these areas which changed hands after every war.

CB What was the normal diet, soup?

HS There was much soup - soup...potatoes, I suppose. I don't know what potatoes you had. On the one hand, I don't have any memory of being particularly hungry there. On the other hand, I remember that onions were a favorite thing, as a supplemental diet. It was one of the things you could buy there: onions. So there couldn't have been too much to eat. But I don't think that it could have been too bad, for you could get packages in, and a lot of people got packages in, and everything was clearly bearable until the Germans came, which was in the beginning of May, 1944.

CB It's precisely in March of '44 when you are trans-

ferred to Csörgo that the pressure begins to step up considerably with Admiral Horthy.

HS Then he begins to appoint the Nidash people, but I mean that was under the pressure of Germany. That's because the Germans came in and, whatever his name, the son-of-a-bitch, I forget the name...

CB Imradi?

HS Imradi! Yes. Then all these Nidash people came to power and things became very, very bad. They were worse than the Germans were, if that was possible, and it became bad in Csörgo, too, immediately. They had one, a Number 1, I remember, one kind of an NCO or something like that. The camp was run by the equivalent of marshals here, maybe, or to the what-do-you-call-it in this country? ... the Sheriff's department here, but it was a more military operation: the Zenda. They were people with a feather in the hat. It was something between military and police. They were very bad. There was one, I remember him particularly - Holbaut was his name. I still remember him, the son-of-a-bitch. He came and gave us a very hard time. Constantly, every moment he would order us out and back in and hopping around and things like this - just for meanness, you know, just for meanness. But it didn't last very long, since this area was one of the first which was evacuated from Jews. Now what the

Hungarians did - they took the Jews from the countryside and put them into ghettos in certain towns, you know, in district towns and the nearest town to where we were was Satoraljaujhely. I was on one of the first transports to the district. The whole camp finally drove down to the district. The whole camp finally drove down to Satoraljaujhely. They dropped us at a station and that was it. It was, I think, on the tenth of May, if I'm not mistaken that we were transferred. We must have been one of the first transports which left Hungary. It started in this area and then it continued with the Ukraine to send the Jewish people away.

CB You left Satoraljaujhely for Auschwitz, is that what you mean? Or is it that you left Csörge?

HS It was the same day. This was the same day. It was all done in one day.

CB Oh, you didn't stop then.

HS No! It took an hour ride on the train. It was not far - just a few miles from Satoraljaujhely.

CB Did you know the destination of the train?

HS Yes. I think that we did. I know we knew the destination and we knew, too, what we could expect on the

other end.

CB You knew the reputation of Auschwitz?

HS Oh, yes!! Oh, yes. It was 1944! By then, everybody knew it by then and we talked about it. We even discussed what kind of soap we, each one of us, would be, and we all decided that I would be a shaving stick because of my shape. I was thin, you know, like a shaving stick.

CB Yes, long and thin.

HS I would be a shaving stick! Don't be shocked, I mean. This kind of humor was rampant.

CB No, this kind of humor, in the face of what was going to happen, sort of intrigues me - that people could still be humorous and laugh.

HS It was kind of subdued. Well, it was not really a ha-ha-ha laugh!

CB No, I know, it was the cynical kind. I don't really want to go into the story of your trip to Auschwitz today, but there are one or two other questions that I'd like to ask about up to this point. What about language difficulties? You did not speak Hungarian, did you?

HS If I would have spoken Hungarian ... I would have tried either Hungarian or Czech - I spoke Hungarian! I could make myself understood, but not enough to go out on my own, you know, not enough to go out on my own and survive. I could go later - later, after the war, I went to Budapest. I could go and buy a pack of cigarettes in a store or go to a restaurant, you know. I spoke enough Hungarian for that, but not to survive. We were very close to the Slovak border, the Slovakian border. If I would have found a group to try to get out and get over into Slovakia, I probably would have done that. There were too many "buts" and "ifs" and it's always easier to do nothing than to do something. I couldn't do it. Maybe I should have tried. You know I was very adventurous at this stage, so maybe I should have tried, but speaking neither Hungarian not a word of Czech or Slovak, I didn't stand a chance. You could get away with Hungarian in Bavaria, but I couldn't do it.

CB Now, what about papers? When you registered with the police in Budapest, did they give you any sort of papers? (HS apparently made a negative response.) So, from the time you left Vienna, you were without identification except your expired school card.

HS I had a paper from the "General Gouvernement" of the Protectorat. Yes, I was always without identifica-

tion papers. It wouldn't have done anything for me. Even if I had them, I had no use for them!

CB At the camp is Csörge, did you run into friends and acquaintances?

HS No, I did not.

CB You were totally alone then?

HS I was not alone.

CB Alone as far as anybody from the past was concerned?

HS I didn't know anybody, but, of course, I made a lot of friends there and one of my sad things is that I think that I'm the only one that is alive from the whole camp. I heard of one person, but I never made contact with him.

CB Was Csörge segregated according to sex - men in one section.. women in another?

HS There were only men!

CB It was only a camp for men. So the transport to Auschwitz was only men that time.

HS I think that even in the car there were only men.

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY OF HENRY STEEBER

Side 5 (Tape 3, Side 1)

This is the fourth interview with Mr. Steeber. It is February 22, 1979. We are in the living room of his home.

CB When we last talked, Mr. Steeber, you had been put, or you were about to be put, on a train bound for Auschwitz. You had left Csörge, gone to the town that I can't pronounce...

HS Satoraljaujhely.

CB Yes. How long did you stay there in Satoraljaujhely at the rail-station?

HS Oh, just transit.

CB From one train to another?

HS No, we were taken down by truck to the station and the train was there, so... right into the train.

CB Heavily guarded?

HS Oh, yes!

CB By Germans or Hungarian?

HS By both. The train itself was guarded by Germans and the Hungarians took us down to the station, as far as I remember. But the train itself was guarded by Germans.

CB Do you have any way of estimating approximately how many men were in the convoy as prisoners on that particular train?

HS Oh, no! I have no idea. I couldn't possibly estimate it. You see, it was not only from Csórgo, which was comparatively small - I think a small outfit - it was from the whole countryside. They brought the people together from the whole countryside, concentrated them in Satoraljaujhely (one of the towns where they ghettoized the people) where they put the people in groups and then took them from there and put them on the train, and as for the whole train, I really have no idea. I could not tell you how long the train was - I could not tell you how many people there were. It is something where I, again, remember certain things very clearly and other things I do not remember at all. I remember one thing - I still see this one fellow from our truck who tried to escape. He jumped off the truck and ran over a field. It was all flat there. He ran across a field and somebody shot him. I think that he fell, so I guess he was hit. But when we got to the train, the people were just put into these freight wagons and the wagons all had a little window on all four sides, close under the roof.

We had little windows, horizontal windows, which were about maybe three feet long and a couple of feet high, maybe - maybe a little bigger. In future trains, they had barbed wire over these windows, but this was one of the very first trains - maybe it was... maybe the first train, I don't know, from our area, and they were open. They were all open - these windows. When they put us into these cars, they made an announcement that anybody who tries to escape would be shot and also that if somebody escaped, one person who was designated the car leader or whatever you want to call him - the car foreman or wagonmaster - would be shot, too, if somebody from his car escaped. If the wagonmaster escapes everybody will be shot. They had the little brake houses at the end of each car - kind of a little caboose. I don't think they have it here. I never saw it here. It had stairs going up to it. They had SS, or SD really, people sitting in there. (The SS or Schutz Staffel were the black shirted Nazi elite guards who were in charge of concentration camps. Schutz Staffel meant Protective Group.)

CB On each car?

HS On each car. Then they were, when we got there, they were on the roofs, too. I don't think they stayed on the roofs later when the train moved, probably, but they were sitting on the roofs, too. We were, I think, eighty some people.

CB In your car?

HS In that car! (The sign posted on the doors of the car stated that their capacity was for 40 people or for 8 horses, lengthwise - that was standard in Europe from the time of W.W. I.)

CS I am trying to picture all this. Was the loading done quickly or did it take quite a bit of time? I mean, for example, the process of getting to the station, getting on the train, getting the train moving... was that hours and hours or was it done very precisely?

HS I think fairly efficiently. It was done quite efficiently. I don't think that there were great delays. Again, I could not give you exact times. It would be impossible to say now.

CB Do you recall whether it was done in great confusion, with a lot of noise?

HS It was noisy, but not great confusion. You see they were pretty well trained, these people, and I think it was done amazingly efficiently - I mean, there was no question about what they wanted.

CB Were people whipped into the cars?

HS No! I didn't see anybody being whipped.

CB Were there dogs, do you recall?

HS Dogs! I don't recall any. I don't recall any dogs, but then I can't tell that there were no dogs.

CB With eighty people in one car, was that so crowded that you could not sit down?

HS You could sit down. It was extremely crowded, but you could sit down, there was very little space.

CB Was the floor of the car covered with straw and then lime? I've read accounts of such things.

HS I didn't see any lime.

CB There were accounts of lime burning people.

HS No! I think that there was straw on the floor. I don't think there was lime. I don't even know if there was straw on the floor, I don't even remember straw. That's a good question. I don't remember. However, there was no lime.

CB These aren't important details, but I think that they help to form a visual picture. Was there a bucket to serve as a latrine?

HS There was a bucket for a latrine - yes. One! I know that somebody died very shortly after we got on the train.

CB In the car?

HS In the car.

CB Of what - heart trouble? I mean, was it just sudden? Did the person appear ill?

HS He died a natural death, I suppose. He was not beaten to death. He just died. I couldn't even tell you who it was and what it was all about. We put him in the corner. He started to smell eventually.

CB Did you take luggage with you? Did you have anything with you?

HS Nothing whatsoever.

CB Did other people have luggage?

HS Well, some people had - you know - some people had... not really bundles. There were people that had a few things, maybe. I had nothing except what I was wearing. Some people had some food, I remember. They got some food sent in. Most of these people in the camp - I was the

only person from Vienna, I guess, really as far as I can remember - most of them were from Rumania and Slovakia and that area and from Hungary.

CB Do you remember: - does anyone in your car stand out in your memory. Do you know any names?

HS I know the name of a pair of brothers. This is the only thing I remember: Pereck. Of course I was with them in the same room, at the same place, we slept together in Cs^or^ogo, that is why I remember them. They tried to teach me Hungarian!

CB Did the ages vary widely?

HS No, well, not really.

CB Teenagers or children?

HS There were some. It was mixed. There was a big group from Cs^or^ogo in that car. Most of these people were from Cs^or^ogo and most of these people were young - youngish people. They were teenagers to their twenties. I don't think there was anybody older than thirty. I'm sure that there was no one older. We had talked already about it, but, I don't know - I don't know whether we decided to get out of the car. I think it was on the way down to the station, in the truck, that we talked about it or maybe it was while we were waiting. There was quite a

long wait. I remember we were sitting around in Csórgo before we got on the truck. We knew already that we would be on a train for Auschwitz. There really was no question in our mind. Maybe not to Auschwitz, but a train to somewhere. Yes, we knew that it was to Auschwitz, sure! We decided - as I said, we were all young people - we decided to jump if possible; to get out of the train, if possible. Now, after this announcement had been made, of course, people were a little bit reluctant about these things, some of the people were not too happy to jump. The train left. It was not a particularly long wait. I think it must have been in the early evening... maybe the whole thing, I think, maybe from departure from Csórgo to the time the train left was maybe from morning to late afternoon. I can only think back approximately to what I can remember of the train leaving. It must have been in the afternoon, for the night came fairly fast. The night came fairly soon, so we decided to jump. Now, again, there were, of course, some people who were afraid of somebody else jumping, because if somebody else jumps and they don't jump, they were afraid they're getting killed, but if you are in a situation like this, you do not particularly think - unfortunately - of somebody else's life - you think of your own life first. So, the people started to jump in the night. I remember that they got out. Now I do not know exactly who got away - I wouldn't know! What I heard after the war, and I only met one person who survived - I don't even know how I met him and how I

talked to him - it was a very strange thing - I have absolutely no recollection of it - I know that he was the only one except me. He told me that he got away and that all the others were dead. Now, I know that a number of people - there are telegraph wires along the right of way - they were low! - a number of people jumped against the wire and fell back against the train. They fell under the train.

CB The telegraph wires were lower than the top of the car?

HS Oh, yes, they were the signal wires, not telegraph wires - a whole bunch of wires. People jumped against (them) and were thrown back under the train and none of (the) people were shot.

I know that I wanted to jump in Slovakia. Slovakia is the country between Hungary and Poland. I thought there was a little more possibility to get lost - not quite as much pressure on everybody as in other places. Of course, we didn't know where we were, exactly. I could have figured it out. I didn't want to jump when it was dark. I thought I would jump when the daylight started, but I fell asleep. I was pretty exhausted, I suppose, and I fell asleep. I woke up when it was pretty light already and so I thought, "I've lost this time! Let me get out of here!" I really had to fight my way to the window and to get through it. The only thing I remember was that I was hanging outside the window and I pushed

myself away so that I didn't get caught by the wires. The next thing I know - I saw the train leaving - the end of the train going on - the end of the train moving away. I was lying on a grassland, on a meadow. I was a couple hundred - I don't know, maybe just a hundred yards from a stone wall, a rough stone wall, and behind it, a short piece of a stone wall if I remember. Behind that were the mountains and woods and I didn't know where I was. It turned out that I missed Slovakia - just - and I jumped in Poland in what was then called the "Generalgouvernement" zone. I wanted to get up and go behind that wall, and I got up and I fell down and then I found out that I was bloody all over the leg and the pain started. I couldn't move my arm. Later I found out that I had a bullet in my leg, through my leg, and one across my shin and that I broke my hip and I broke my shoulder. Somehow I got behind. I dragged myself on my side, on my right side. I dragged myself behind the wall so there must have been an end to it, for I got behind it. I think that some women saw me. Anyhow, a short time after - a short time afterwards - four people stood around me with guns. They were the S.D. You know the S.D. was the security service of the Gestapo. They were active in the Generalgouvernement - they were in charge in that area of Poland. By that time, I didn't particularly care. I think I remember that it was not of great importance whether they would shoot me or not. I guess it didn't make much difference; but, on the other hand, it must have made some difference to me because I told them that

I got into this train only by mistake - that my name is Henry Brook - that I am an English citizen. They looked at me and they didn't know what to do with me and they walked away and came back again. I really have no idea of the length of time or anything. I was not with it!

CB Well, you were probably in and out of consciousness - passing out and coming to.

HS I don't know - I guess so. I don't know, really. This came later. I remember they put me on a wagon. They took me to a station. I know there was a station which, I know from what I saw on pictures, was Auschwitz. I was lying on the ground and a few people came over and looked at me. Suddenly they decided, I guess, that they didn't know what to do. They decided to take me back and make the decision later. They picked me up and put me into an empty freight car. How they put me in there I remember very vividly! They took the litter and turned it over! I remember that very vividly. Somebody, I guess, gave me some straw, I remember, and some water - a bowl of water. Then we went on a trip again and then I was delirious - this - again I remember - my delirium during much of the way. It appeared to me that the doors opened and all the people who were in the car suddenly came back into the car. They walked back into the car and things like this. One thing that I remember very vividly was the doors opening and the people coming in. I must have screamed or whatever - I don't know what I did - for somebody

stuck his head in, at one point, and said, "Don't worry, you will be there soon". They took me back to Košice (48.43N, 21.15E - otherwise said very close to Csörgö). At some times it was Hungarian and at other times it was Czech. So I was not far from where I started. Košice is now in Czechoslovakia. It was not Czech at that time - it was Hungarian and known as Kassa. They put me into a military hospital and treated me quite well. I was in room with a lot of other people, of course, in a ward - in a big ward. But they took care of my hip. It was a miserable thing. Of course, it got very, very painful, but they rearranged my hip and nailed it, I guess. I don't know exactly what they did with it. And they also took care of my shoulder and gave me food. Food was fairly decent. They treated me fairly decently. The people were Hungarians, of course - all of them were Hungarian. Of course, they did not think there that I was a Jew - don't forget, I was Henry Brook. I don't know how they would have treated me if they would have known I am a Jew. Of course, I wouldn't have had the same treatment. I was kind of a curiosity.

CB May I interrupt you? But maybe you would rather continue, though.

HS No, no, no.. go ahead.

CB You told me when I first met you, and we weren't taping at that time, that before this ever happened you had

already figured out that in case something like this did happen, that you were going to use the alias. When did, that actually take place?

HS Before I left Csⁱorgo, I think, I talked to some people about it, even. I don't know how it was received. But, yes, I talked to them about it already - I mean I started it, in a way. I was kind of mysterious about it. I remember that I said that it might be a surprise or something like this. I mean that it didn't help me to get away from Cs^orgo, so nobody took it as being very serious I think.

CB Why the name, Henry Brook? Does that have any significance?

HS Absolutely not! Absolutely no significance. "Henry" - you see I figured that it was something I could remember easily. Heinz translates as Henry, right? "Brook" - I have no idea. Not even Brooks or anything which is much more common than Brook. I also had to have a birthdate. My parents' wedding day was the twelfth of December, so I made my birthday the 12th of December, 1922, because it's easy to remember, right? 12-12-22 is easy to remember. I did all this because, as you know, it is very easy to trip yourself up with these things. For my birthday - it was the 12th of December, 1922. The funny thing is that, just as an aside, later, after the war, when I got to England, under also odd circumstances, I

found out that there was a Henry Brook in England with a birthdate of the 12th of December, 1922. That was the funniest thing because it's a rare name, Brook, without an "e" at the end or without an "s" at the end - just B R O O K - with the same birthday which I had imagined.

CB How did you find that out?

HS In England, I wasn't free. The English police had gotten me. I got in illegally, into England, and I got into a camp in Wimbledon in England. They came and they interrogated me in Wimbledon and one of the questions was "How do you know Henry Brook?" I said, "I don't". After that all I was was Henry Steeber and I repeated who I was. I said, "I don't know Henry Brook". They said, "Of course you know Henry Brook!" I said, "No! Who is Henry Brook?" I said, "I don't know him. I invented him." Back came, "How can you say you invented him? Henry Brook was born there and there on the 12th of December, 1922."

CB Quite a coincidence! When you jumped off the train and were found by these two women, after you crawled behind the wall and the SD guards came up, what language did you speak to them in? English? German? Polish?

HS Not in Polish. I don't speak a word of Polish! To the guards? In German, I guess. I don't really remember. I guess in German. English... I only acquired an English

accent later. When I spoke German I acquired an English accent, I think, to make it more authentic - it was a slight English accent. I spoke German with a slight English accent, but I don't think I had it then. I spoke German to them, I guess.

CB You spoke English with a heavy German accent, though?

HS Much less than I do now - much less of an accent than I have now. I spoke better English then than I speak English now.

CB So you felt that by adopting this alias and saying that you were an Englishman that you were so secure in the language that you could see it through?

HS Oh, yes! Oh, yes! I spoke English quite fluently - especially for Germans, I mean. There was no question about it. I spoke English quite fluently and I did not have probably the vocabulary I've acquired since, but I spoke it, and, let's face it, most people get away with what I had. Most English speaking people get away with a vocabulary of five hundred words. And the funny thing was that I had a pair of shoes, high shoes, which had very high, high toes. They were round, high toes and somehow they looked like parachute boots, uh paratrooper boots. I think this was the reason that they thought they'd made a catch.

CB Well, one other question before we get to the hospital and recuperation and so forth: You must have jumped fairly close to Auschwitz, if that's where you ended up?

HS Yes, yes. I don't know how close I was - if they took me to Auschwitz, as a matter of course, that was the terminal: Auschwitz. Where should they have taken me? I mean, anybody who could make a decision about me would have been in Auschwitz. Whether it was Dr. Mengele or somebody else - I don't know who it might have been - who might have decided. They were all in Auschwitz.

CB As far as you know, you weren't inside Auschwitz. You were at the railroad in the cars. (In Auschwitz there were railroad tracks all over. See history of Dr. Murray Weisman).

HS No! I remember a long building - a long, shed-like building with a platform in front. There was a fairly wide platform in front, next to the tracks. I only mean I never saw the name "Auschwitz" anywhere or whatever derivation they had. All I can surmise is that it was Auschwitz, because I saw pictures and there were a great number of people around - a great number of SS and SD around, etc. etc. It seems logical that it was Auschwitz.

CB How long were you at the hospital, recuperating?

HS For two months.

CB This would, then, have been July - Mid-July?

HS Right! They took me from the hospital when there was the assassination attempt on Hitler. On the 20th of July, right? So, I left on the tenth of July or something like that. I think on the tenth of July - just about two months. For I think I got there on the tenth of May. They took me out of the hospital and took me to a prison in Kassa. In that prison, I stayed for, it must have been about ten days. It was a place that was held together by cockroaches - not by cockroaches, but by bedbugs. That was worse - they were bedbugs. Yes, I never saw anything like this. If you didn't fall asleep while the light was on, you had no - absolutely no - chance of falling asleep later. It was unbelievable. We didn't have any mattresses or anything - just boards. What do you call it - pallets? What do you call them?

CB Mattresses?

HS No, not mattresses. No. What do you call a wooden board?

CB The frames - the bed frame?

HS No, not that!

CB Slats? (HS probably means wooden bed boards.)

HS Not slats. They were long things like slats. We took them up. We unscrewed them and took them up and took some newspaper and lit it and burned the bugs. Burned them out. It helped a little bit once in a while, but there were millions and millions of bugs! I never saw anything like it! They fell in the food and everything.

CB Was the hospital a civilian or military hospital?

HS Military.

CB And so many soldiers were there.

HS Yes.

CB German or Hungarian?

HS No.

CB Hungarians?

HS Next to me was a Yugoslav, I guess. I think that he was a Yugoslav fellow. There were Hungarians. I don't think there was another German - Hungarian and the allies, if you excuse the expression.

CB Were you interrogated?

HS Yes.

CB Frequently and consistently?

HS A number of times by Gestapo and I had to tell them a story. Again, I had plenty of time to think about stories. I had a story which I still can't believe it that I ever got away with it for one second. The story was that my mother was married the first time - that there was a first marriage - you see, I couldn't get away from "Stieber" - that was one thing. I had to give somehow some connection to her first marriage that she had been married to an Englishman named "Brook", and that I was the issue of that marriage. Now that Heinz Stieber - that would make him my half brother, right? But they never questioned why the son of the first marriage was three years younger than the son of the second marriage.

CB You had no papers with you at the time.

HS No.

CB You had lost those?

HS Oh, I abandoned them. I threw them away.

CB Yes!

HS I threw them all away. I threw everything I had away. I

didn't want any identification. I had a different name, too. I had the identification about which I already told you, on which my friend painted the stamps, you know, the Kennkarte from Czechoslovakia, in a different name, and I didn't want to jeopardize these people, so I destroyed them, in time.

CB What was your story about having no papers?

HS Oh, that was nothing. It was natural to have no papers. Having been through these camps, you wouldn't have any papers anymore. If you didn't have any, that was that. Nobody had papers! I had been at the K.E.O.K.H. (the Hungarian police) so they took my papers. That was natural.

CB One reads fantastic stories like this, that almost are so wild they seem unreal, and one always has the opinion, at least I do, that the Gestapo was very efficient and had all sorts of contacts in England. They could have checked English birth records and found who Henry Brook was. Is that kind of efficiency a myth?

HS I think it is a myth. I think they were stupid. They were organized to destroy. For that, they were extremely well organized. There were trains there, come hell or high water, come defeat, starving or draught, and people starving on the front, but they had the trains to deport Jews. But that was just about all. They devel-

oped a very efficient system to hoodwink the people, a fairly good system to blind the people, to get them on these trains, to get them to the camps without great fights. They were organized, but that's all. But as soon as something got a little, a little bit out of the guidelines, I don't think that they did anything. I don't think it was in their system - there was too much of a mixture of people - too many poles attracting power and too many counter-poles there, too, in the Gestapo. Look, you dealt with an overgrown bureaucracy. Did you ever see anywhere an overgrown bureaucracy which is efficient?

CB No. You also dealt with very brutish people.

HS Not necessarily. Not all of them. There were a lot of intellectuals there - a lot of failed intellectuals in the Gestapo: lawyers, doctors, scientists - usually people who couldn't make it anywhere else - who didn't make it. A number of such people! The main thing is that it was a tremendous bureaucracy which was overwhelming. Now the Central European systems always tended toward bureaucracy. They had the "Beamte", the Mister Official who always had something to achieve in the "Petit Bourgeoisie", the middle-class people. Sometimes he wore a uniform and had a title and had a pension when he retired. So there was always something to achieve! Everybody had a title! Everybody was important and everybody would propagate his little circle. This was

the most important thing in the world! So, efficiency was not possible. They couldn't be efficient. Impossible. Of course, they would not have wasted time to check in England. I don't know whether really they could have. Maybe they could have - I don't know, but I think that by that time, in 1944, I think the German intelligence apparatus in England was no more. They did a fairly thorough job in England to get rid of them.

CB In these interrogations, was there ever any rough treatment?

HS No!

CB Never any threat of rough treatment?

HS That, yes. However, nothing really was done. Strangely enough, somehow, some of these threats sounded hollow. They sounded more ridiculous even at that time, more ridiculous than real. Maybe I just didn't take them seriously. I am, by birth, a Viennese, and we have one watchword: "The situation is hopeless, but not serious."

CB I haven't heard that before.

HS OK, so you heard it now!

CB Well, I am sorry to interrupt you with these kinds of questions, because it does interrupt your flow. You had

gotten into the prison. Now what prison was it, again?

HS Just a prison. I really don't remember. Some kind of a prison.

CB Where?

HS In the same town - in Csörgo. (It is suspected that he means Kassa, rather than Csörgo.)

CB Were you in a cell that had a number of people in it, or were you alone?

HS Yes, with a number of people.

CB What kind of people? Were they prisoners of war?

HS No, they were not.

CB Were they civilians?

HS They were civilians. I guess there were some prominent people. A couple of them were Jews, I remember. They kept them on ice, for some particular reason, there. There were a couple of very nice people there in the cell. We had a good time. Just before I got to the prison I had developed a boil behind my ear which was extremely painful. It had just started. I couldn't move my head, and I went to the doctor at the prison - that

was actually a treatment staff. He looked at it and said, "Just a moment" and took a pair of scissors and stuck them in a couple of times and squeezed and said, "It's all right". It was all right! It didn't bother me anymore. I stayed in that prison, I mean this is all I can remember about it - that was not very memorable - the boil - except for the bedbugs - until the twentieth of July.

On the 20th of July they rounded up, I think, anybody they could, for a trip. I went on the trip; it was an interesting trip with two Gestapo agents and a couple of other people. I think they were, but I am not sure, two young people, I think they were Czech. I remember that they were in handcuffs all the time. They never put a handcuff on me. I didn't walk very well. I had a stick or something. It was still very hard for me to walk. I didn't walk well at all!

We went with a car, I remember, to Budapest. In Budapest we got on a train and got to Vienna. In Vienna, I had a slight intention, again, to get away. I could have gotten away at that time, but I couldn't walk, it was very dark, there was a blackout - I could have gotten away pretty easily just then. We went from one railroad station to another. That's what we did... So it would have been comparatively easy for me to get away. However, I wasn't able to move much - it was still hard for me to walk. It had been only two months since I had

broken my hip... my arm and everything was still hurting.

From Vienna, we went to Prague. In Prague, they put me into another prison. Uh...That was Pankraz prison. It was a very famous prison.

CB I've heard of that.

HS I stayed in Pankraz from July for six to eight weeks. Then, again, I was picked up and put on the prisoner transport to Berlin. It took quite a while to get there and I was with Russian prisoners and political prisoners, mostly Russian - a lot of Russians and a lot of political prisoners, too. It took us, I am sure, five or six days at least, maybe more. I think we stayed somewhere for a few days - I think in Leipzig... I think... or Dresden. I don't know where it really was - I don't remember where, but it took about a week, maybe, to get to Berlin, from Prague.

CB This tape has ended. Do you want to stop here or do you want to go on for a bit longer? It's 4:20.

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY OF
HENRY STEEBER

Side 6 (Tape 3, Side 2)

This is part of the fourth interview with Mr. Steeber.

CB Were you still interrogated frequently on this long trip
and in Pankraz prison?

HS No!

CB The interrogation ceased.

HS Yes, it had ceased. There wasn't any at all!

CB Was it another boxcar trip from Vienna to Berlin?

HS No, not from Vienna to Berlin. It was, as far as I can
remember, from Budapest to Vienna. And from Vienna to
Prague, it was just by regular passenger car. From
Prague to Berlin there were prison cars most of the
time. These were cars with a corridor and cages.

CB Again, do you remember anyone who was with you by name,
by impression, or by face?

HS I don't remember really, except one fellow. I remember

just one fellow. He was, I am quite sure, gay - as gay as they come. He wrote me after the war a letter how much he admired me. I don't know where it is - maybe I still have it somewhere. I didn't see it for a long time. Maybe I threw it away. I don't know. He wrote how much he admired me on this trip in all that company, in all that rough company, how I kept my stiff upper lip, considering that I was going towards a fairly certain execution of some kind or another, etc. etc. Finally, he survived it, too. I don't know why he was in. He was a double or triple agent for somebody, I think. He was that type. He survived it, also. They all survived - these people. And I saw him again after the war and he turned out, I think, to be the most repulsive person I ever met in my life - at least one of the most repulsive persons. And I think that he fell on hard times later. There was nobody anymore who wanted his services, I guess.

CB It's intriguing to me how you encounter these passing acquaintances after the war is over with. I want to talk to you about that later on. I'm going to make a note now to remember that. Whether it was just chance encounters or whether people began to seek out people that they had known by signs on bulletin boards and letters or such.

HS I don't think so, really.

CB Just chance?

HS I never made an effort. I made an effort to meet people I knew before the war.

CB For example, this fellow who was on the train with you to Auschwitz - you said that you later saw him and he told you that all had perished.

HS I met him absolutely by accident. He might have looked me up or I might have heard that he was around and I might have made a slight effort. Truthfully, I don't remember, but it was nothing very well planned so that I got to see him. I know that I met somebody and this is something I've tried to remember many times - not only now, but many times. It was the only person, after all, whom I saw. I've tried to remember more details about him many times, but I can't do it. I absolutely cannot.

CB What happened when you got to Berlin with the other prisoners?

HS In Berlin, they put me into a Gestapo prison. That was a part of a former Jewish hospital which was taken over by the Gestapo, and its commander was Hauptstaffelführer Dobberke. I remember him very well.

CB Cruelty? Or Arrogance?

HS I just don't know. You can tell me, maybe. He was average. He was rough. He was mean. He would constantly threaten people with what he would do to them. I guess he, maybe, hit some people. He never hit me. I wouldn't have done anything. I just remember him in front of me. I don't know why.

CB Were you again in a cell with others?

HS Well, first they put me down into what was known as the bunker. It was the former morgue of the hospital. They took the bodies out before they put us in. These were the desperate cases which they put down there - those who presented a danger of escaping. They locked us in the cave. Again, comparatively speaking, it wasn't so bad. Everybody had a little thing - a little cubicle, all tiled, I guess, with a sink - a little sink. Then there was a room outside the cubicle where there were some bunks, also, I remember. I got one of these bunks and that was already a step forward - if you were not locked in anymore - into these cells. I stayed there for awhile. I am trying to remember people. They were not necessarily only Jews in there. There were people who had run afoul of the Gestapo for one reason or another. Some were quite unsavory characters, really. Quite a number of these people tried to play all sides. There was one in there whom I remember - he was working for the Mufti (the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem had started the Anti-Jewish riots in Palestine in 1936 as help to

the Nazis) and he was working for some allies, too. Rather unsavory characters were there. Later, I think, it was in November or December, I was put again in a cell, then they took quite a number of people and formed what was probably, at that time, one of the last transports to Auschwitz. We knew that we were going to Auschwitz. I don't think they made a secret of it - that it was going to Auschwitz. I think that I was still going around with my cane - my big stick. Somehow I got to Dobberke. I still see him. He had big blue eyes - very much thyroid eyes.

CB Bulging eyes?

HS Yes, bulging eyes. You know, I never checked what happened to him. He never did much to me. I got to see him and I told him, "Listen, you can't send me to Auschwitz. I am a British citizen and I have notified" (how I could have done it, I really don't know - I repeated, as I must have thought of a way then - I can't think of one now) "I have notified the Swiss embassy that I am here and you can't send me to Auschwitz!" I remember that he looked at me and stared strangely, and he just turned around and walked away. I thought, "Well, I tried". Five minutes before the transport left, they said, "Brook, you stay - you stay behind!" How and why I don't know up to today. I don't know what the reason was. They even took me out of the bunker and they took me upstairs somewhere. They had a number of

rooms upstairs and they put me in a room - alone in a room - I remember. For a while I had a room all to myself. All around me there were people. They had a lot of prominent Hungarians. As far as I remember, there was a Kaester - I'm not sure of the name, but he was one of the Hungarian Jewish delegates who tried to sell some Jews for trucks. (Reference is made here to an attempt to ransom some Jews for army trucks which the Allies refused).

CB I know about that incident, but I don't know the names involved.

HS They had people like this. Then I was in a large room with quite a lot of people in it. There were again a great lot of Jews there. He came one day and told people something we had never heard before about Bergen-Belsen. He said that certain people are going to be sent to Bergen-Belsen and he assured us that Bergen-Belsen is very nice. He told us, "Nothing will happen to you in Bergen-Belsen." This was a typical approach. There were men and women together up there in that large room. Again, I remember much less about this than I remember from downstairs in the bunker. It was called the bunker. I remember much more about this. I don't remember much about the big room!

CB Let's stop and I'll pick it up at that point in our next interview.

Fourth interview ends.

CB This is the fifth interview with Mr. Henry Steeber. It is Tuesday, March 13th and we are in the living room of his apartment.

HS Where did you stop?

CB At the end of the interview you had gotten to Berlin and were in a Gestapo prison. It was approximately December of 1944. You had talked about being in the bunker of the prison for a number of months, then a transport going to Auschwitz - you were almost put on that.

HS That name is spelled wrong, by the way. I don't think you will ever have the opportunity to spell Dobberke's name, but it's D-o-b-b-e-r-k-e, as far as I remember. That would be the logical German way to spell it.

CB I would spell it just the same. I meant to ask you later about the correct spelling - thank you!

HS I think so. Anyhow, that is the logical way to spell it in German.

CB So, would you, in chronological sense, take your experiences on down to the end of the war, the late spring, early summer of 1945, and then stop and let me ask you

some questions?

HS Well, eventually, I was put on another transport from Berlin. I found out that it was going to Theresienstadt. I did not object to it, since I figured that it would be the best thing which could happen to me at that time. I went on the transport to Theresienstadt. I think it was in... I probably could find the exact date... January or February of 1945. In Theresienstadt I managed to get myself a comfortable job, if you call it this, and even accommodations to sleep, which were comparatively not too bad for the circumstances. Theresienstadt, at that time, was in a state of turmoil; very soon after I came there, it was really in a state of partial dissolution. The Germans didn't know what was going to happen. There were some plans to gas people in the so-called Ghetto, and then there was a plan in which I was included, to take certain people which might have some value as hostages - take them and put them somewhere in the Alps, where they wanted to make a last stand and keep them there for possible exchange.

CB Bargaining purposes?

HS Yes. There was a representative of the Red Cross who came to the camp a couple of times, Mr. Dunant (D-u-n-a-n-t). He was there once, I remember, with Eichmann (that would be Adolf Eichmann) and then I saw Mueller with him once. Then the time came when you

really didn't know were the SS still there or were they gone? Whether the Czechs took over the camp? There were a great amount of rumors. Before the Russians actually came, the Germans were gone. What I remember was that we had a ceremony - the raising of the Czech flag in the camp. Then, some of the Germans who went by shot into the Ghetto - I don't know whether it was intentionally, but they shot into the Ghetto. I remember that I was standing with a friend, the fellow from Chicago I was telling you about, Dr. Neuhaus. We were standing, talking. There were very old houses with courtyards and a lot of walls. Right next to the wall, but behind it, a grenade hit - right behind that wall where we were. It was a very confusing time. Also, in April, I think a great many transports arrived from outside camps (camps located further East) - also transports of people who were picked up, maybe on marches (the forced marches to evacuation camps), but I think it was mostly from outside camps - various camps. They were brought to Theresienstadt from various camps (further East, which the Russian troops were threatening). There were a great number of trains coming in. They contained people in very, very bad shape. There were quite a few people who were dead on the trains and quite a number had to be put in the hospital. Actually, we had to quarantine the whole area for typhus - an outbreak of typhus. But I never knew the difference in English between typhoid fever and typhus; what is what! One is from lice and the other one is not from lice.

CB I confess that I don't know either.

HS Yes. So one is transmitted by lice (that would be typhus)! I guess it was the one which was transmitted by lice, for, of course, they were rampant on these people. We helped out at the rail station to unload people and other tasks. It was still an unpleasant time! Then, one day, the last day, we were standing by the road - there was an entrance gate and a wall around the whole thing - it was an old garrison town with the wall - as I said, we were standing by the gate and looking out down the road. A road went right by the wall. There were Germans driving down the road, I think, and maybe a hundred yards further back, the Russians came right on their heels. I remember their faces when they drove by. Suddenly there was cheering and jubilation. They didn't know what had happened to them, for this was all a German area. It was formerly Czechoslovakia, but it was mostly the Sudeten area - a lot of Sudeten people were still around. (The Sudeten people dismembered Czechoslovakia in 1938 to "rejoin" their German land.) Theresienstadt was close to the border. Then we were taken over by the Russians.

CB What date was it, do you remember?

HS No. You will have to look it up. I really don't remember. It was in May, some date in May. I tried to get

out as fast as possible. First of all, I didn't want the Russian liberation or occupation - whatever you want to call it. They had a strange way of showing their sympathies, as a group. The Russians did all right, but you had a feeling that the whole thing was a nuisance to them. That was, at best, a nuisance. It was a "go away, don't bother me" type of attitude. So, I tried to get out as fast as possible. I was out of Theresienstadt about two days after the Russians came.

CB Now let me stop there and back up and ask you some questions...

HS Oh, yes.

CB Theresienstadt has always intrigued me because of what seems to me, contradictions in the writing, descriptions of Theresienstadt. In many accounts, it appears, as well, not at all a concentration camp. You get the accounts talking about the Jewish professionals and the intellectuals, the artists who were sent to Theresienstadt and comparatively speaking, compared to those who were in Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz, Dachau, they were rather well off. I hate to use that term! Comparatively speaking they were rather well off. Then, on the other hand, you get these sad, sad stories about the children of Theresienstadt!

HS Not only the children - the old people, too!

CB Yes, the old people of Theresienstadt. So could you cut through all of that, those contradictions and give me a really accurate description of that place!

HS No, because I wasn't there. When I was in Theresienstadt, don't forget, Theresienstadt was, compared to other times, half empty. There was no overcrowding there anymore - no serious overcrowding. One of the terrible things in Theresienstadt, as I understood from people when I was there, was that, before I came, you had twenty people in a space for five. The space which was barely enough for five people had twenty people crowded in. Now, when I came to Theresienstadt, there were still a lot of places where it was too crowded. They then had barracks. They had built some quonset huts - some barrack type things in the middle of a square - two big barracks with rows of cots, three stories high or two stories high. I slept there one night and the bugs, the bedbugs were just crawling over you there. It was impossible to sleep. I said, "It's not for me! I don't think I'm going to stay here. If there's any other place I'll look around." I saw that it was a place where you could try to make changes. You didn't have this terrible regimentation, as in a concentration camp. It's quite true - you didn't! It's one thing you didn't have (at least not then). Anyhow, they put you in your "Ubikation", as it was called - your quarters, and then you had to go and look for work

and get work and get registered at 692 stations. (The term "Ubikation" cannot be verified in a German dictionary.)

CB But it was up to you to do all that?

HS Right. It was up to me to do all this. But I had to do it - but it was up to me. So, there was a certain non-regimentation which you wouldn't have had in a concentration camp. I was able, as I mentioned some time ago, to have a fast look around and I decided that the hospital is always the most comfortable place in an area like this - you never went wrong in a hospital. If there was anything to be had at all, it was to be had at the hospital. So I tried to get into the hospital. I had absolutely no background for this. Somehow, I don't really remember how exactly, I got into the laboratory - the medical laboratory. It was kind of a congenial place. There were some nice people there. I really don't remember exactly why the laboratory and how I got there - whether I was told to go there or not. Anyway, I got there and I told them that I know something about laboratory work, which I did not. I was hired - I mean I was put there to work - not hired. The chief of the laboratory, who is the father of my friend in Chicago, I think, he knew quite well that I didn't know the first thing. He put me to do easy things, you know, urine analysis and these things which anybody can do. So I learned while I went along and I was able to get out of

this bug place and I had a cot or bed somewhere in the hospital, not far from the laboratory - in a hallway, I think. It may have been an extra room. I don't even know. I was sleeping there. It was (not) the worst! I even could shower. I could use the hospital shower! That was something which was quite a luxury. One thing, of course, you forget about it - is the lack of food. We were just about constantly hungry. You never had enough to eat. It was, of course, out of the question, to have enough to eat. (The entire German nation was on very short rations in 1944 and 1945.) I managed to get some extra rations somehow. I got a little bit of margarine and a little sugar, and I had a friend - a girl friend at that time - someone who worked in the laboratory, too. The young woman - I think she was Czech - I don't remember her name even (that's terrible!) - we saved for a whole week. When I got sugar, we saved a whole week and she got something, we saved this for a whole week, and once a week, it sounds terrible, really - we had bread - a piece of bread with margarine and sugar on it. That was the great delicacy for the week. It was once a week. Most of the time, the food was terrible. We ate turnips, turnips, turnips, turnips - that was the main(stay) - turnips and

CB Soup? Cabbage? Potatoes?

HS No - not even cabbage! Cabbage was good already, cabbage and potatoes - that was a holiday meal - cabbage

and potatoes. No, mostly...uh...pumpkins! Some type of pumpkin which was scraped. I don't know how they were prepared but they were very watery - very watery. It was feed stuff! It was not fit for human consumption. That was, I think, one of the main problems, I think. Of course, for everything you had to line up - to stand in line for a long time - that was unavoidable.

CB Most of the children were gone by that time? All of them?

HS Yes!

CB The children? All of the old people had been transported out?

HS The children and the old people? There were no old people - there were some old people, but I mean very, very few. Most of them either died there or they were transported away. The children? There were no children? There were no children. They were all gone. Of course, you've read a lot about Theresienstadt. You read that they had some rather tough times there, too; that they had some people hanged. The hangings and all of this, but just Theresienstadt itself, would have been a rather bearable place if it wouldn't have been for the transports - especially for the overcrowding to start with, then if it wouldn't have been for the transports later to empty the place. If you were in Theresienstadt

at a time when it was not overcrowded and if you didn't leave on the transports, you had a very good chance to survive - if you wanted to survive. I still think that the wanting to survive was the most important point - the most important criteria for survival. There were too many people who just let themselves go. Now there were other camps where the will for survival was not enough. If you got hit on the head enough times, you're not going to survive if you want to or not. So in that way, Theresienstadt, I suppose, was preferable to any other place. I think it was.

CB Did you run into many old acquaintances in Theresienstadt? Did you contact anyone from the past?

HS One, yes, yes... Again, I know that it must have been just at the time. Still in Theresienstadt - this is interesting - I was thinking one day something was said about Roosevelt who was still alive. He had spoken in Yalta or some place and I remember thinking, "Well, he is going to see the end of the war. I'm not. I don't think I'm going to see it!" Well, two days later, he was dead - he was dead and I did see the end of the war. Just around this time, I met a fellow from Berlin, I knew. He was the brother of a friend of our family. Our friend was a Dr. Eisenberg and this was his brother, which we did not know all that well. He is the one who told me, but I don't know how he knew it, that I was lucky that I got out in time from Berlin when I did, for

the Gestapo looked very actively for me later.

CB The administration of the camp at this period - you said it was in somewhat of a disarray or chaos.

HS I don't think the administration was so much. You see, there were two administrations. One was the Jewish administration and one was the German one. But the Germans didn't know really whether they were coming or going. They started to have mixed feelings quite early during my stay there. I would think that the Jewish administration really functioned to the end. (The Germans knew that they were losing the war and that they would be personally held responsible for atrocities - but they received messages telling them to finish off all the Jews.)

CB That was what I was going to get around to asking you. Did you mean also that the Jewish administration was in disarray?

HS No, no. I think they functioned quite well to the end.

CB Did you, outside of the hospital, did you have any contact with the higher Jewish officials?

HS No. Absolutely, no. I didn't meet anybody. I didn't know anybody. I had really no interest in it whatsoever. All I was interested in was getting out of it as

fast as possible. No, I wasn't interested in getting to meet anybody.

CB Now, there's a large question I want to ask you and I hope you won't take this in a way that I don't mean it. I would like to ask it before we go on, because, in effect now, with May of 1945, you have survived. Now all through these interviews you've told me in a very effective way the chronology of what's happened, but I have the feeling that you really haven't revealed very much about your attitudes, your emotions, the impact that these events had on you. You never have told me, and maybe you didn't feel this, but you never have told me that you had moments of despair. Did you have moments when you thought all was lost? When you thought perhaps it wasn't worth making an effort to go on? Did you have moments of great fear?

HS Oh, yes. Oh, sure. Fear was there. I would lie to you if I would say that I can recall all the emotions I had.

CB I understand that you cannot.

HS I cannot! Fear was very strong. Of course, it was endemic. It was always there. Despair? I don't know. I don't know. It's very hard for me to recall my emotions today.

CB Now, I understand - I realize it's a difficult question,

but I am just wondering.

HS But, of course, there was fear. Of course, there was fear constantly. Do you think that when I jumped out of the train, I wasn't afraid? Of course, I was afraid.

CB Well, you were a very brave person. Sometimes brave people don't have fear - sometimes they live with it constantly. I just wondered which it was.

HS I think I am a person and I think I was a person. I will put it in the past. I was a person who had many fears and didn't let the fears interfere with what I wanted to do. I think I overcame many of the fears. Maybe I peed my pants doing it (laughing), but I did it!

CB Also, there's an aspect to this risk-taking: the willingness to take risks.

HS There is no risk!

CB Well, there are risks.

HS There is no risk! You see, this is one thing which I know - jumping out of the train - if you face what I felt was certain death at the other end of the line, I didn't find jumping out of the train requires any courage. It's the lesser of the evils. What have I got to lose? I know that there are people who are not able to

do this - who will go and rather be killed and not be able to act - even act their conviction that they're going to be killed and that it's better to take a risk before. I know that. But I never was that way.

CB Well, that was my question. Were you never that way or did the willingness to take risks grow on you so that it became almost second nature to you as you look back now?

HS Probably not. Probably, you're quite right. Probably it grew on me, for I know there was a time - I don't know how it came about - I was thinking about jumping out of a plane with a parachute - the idea didn't phase me at all. I wouldn't have minded it at all - it wouldn't have bothered me at all. Now, I think I would have to have my head examined if I would jump out with a parachute. I wouldn't jump out for anything. I wouldn't jump out - I wouldn't make a parachute jump - It would be crazy. At that time, I wouldn't have minded one way or another. I would have jumped.

CB Well, of course, I think it must be said, generally speaking, that youth is less cautious. And you were young and I think that was in your favor greatly.

HS Well, I think I wouldn't have jumped before and I wouldn't have jumped after, right after. I remember the very thought when it was over, I would think, "It's crazy!" I wouldn't jump out of an airplane now. I

don't think I could. I would be deadly afraid. Then, I would have been afraid, too, but it wouldn't have bothered me. The state of mind is different - it's completely different. Values, of course, are completely different. Human life is different. I tell you that it is not nice to say that a human life was unimportant or less important, not only for the enemies, it was less important for us, too. I don't think that you can expect, in a camp, very many cases of self-sacrifice, that is, somebody sacrificing himself or herself to save somebody else. You become very, very selfish and I think you had to be selfish to survive.

CB Well, I would tend to agree with that. I'm also curious about these long months - these weeks and months that you spent in the hospital and in prison. What did you do to while away the time? What did you do to keep yourself occupied? Was there just constant conversation with others?

HS In the hospital? Oh, in Hungary, you mean. In Hungary in the prison, oh.. there was....

CB And in the Gestapo prison in Vienna.

HS Yes, there was. I never was alone. We probably played - we played cards. And I remember that I learned a new card game in the prison in Csörgő. After I came out of the hospital and got into prison, before I went on the

transport to Berlin, I learned a new card game there. I haven't the remotest idea what it was, but I learned a new card game there. Yes, we played cards and talked a lot. It was not that terrible. Even in Pankraz, the chap I didn't have much in common with... I remember there was a young Czech in there, a political prisoner, a nice fellow. We talked. There was nothing to read, I remember, but somehow I don't think I remember that there really was not enough to eat to be too much concerned with activity.

CB Just a general malaise? Lack of energy?

HS Yes, I think so!

CB Let me stop this tape. It's almost run out... And I will put a new one on.

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY OF HENRY STEEBER

Side 7 (Tape 4, Side 1)

CB This is the fifth interview with Mr. Steeber, on March 13, 1979.

Oh, I had one other question on my mind. I can't recall what it was. I really wanted to ask it. It had to do with the imprisonment in Berlin. You said that there were a number of unsavory characters in that prison, some double, triple agents, such as someone working with the Mufti.

HS That was according to him. There were many people who would tell any story at all. Number one, to attract some attention. Number two, to maybe create some suspicion, or some ideas, or some doubts in the German's mind about them. Many did this, too. "Maybe he shouldn't be in here? May he can be used." Then, there were some people, unfortunately... they were not all Jews in there - there was a mixture - who thought..."Maybe he can be used to our advantage?" Some people would let themselves be used to the German's advantage, such as, they would make a broadcast, they would do something like that.

CB Did you ever have any indication that there were what we would call "plants" among the prisoners?

HS No. There was no need for that. Everybody was there. I mean, nobody really denied being there, for whatever reason. If anything, they would add to the so-called interest of their case. Everybody knew why I was there. For the Jews who were there, there was no need to have a plant. For the Jews, what they said or didn't say, wouldn't make any difference. They took them to Auschwitz. The others, maybe there were some about whom they were not sure, but I don't think so... maybe, but I don't think so. I never thought about this, truthfully.

CB Were there any, what I would characterize as ruffians, really, ruffians that one must be in fear of in this Gestapo prison?

HS No! Absolutely not!

CB No problems of prisoner against prisoner?

HS No. There was nobody there, really, who was a ruffian. They were all quite well-behaved people. Some more so than others. There was nothing like having to be scared of each other. Is that the right way of putting it?

CB Yes.

HS No prison in Europe was that way: I have been a prisoner in Berlin, I have been a prisoner in Prague, I've

been a prisoner in Budapest.

CB In Csör^go?

HS No, the prisons were not set up this way.

CB A different age and a different area? Different standards?

HS Yes, completely. You know, you were not in prison for anything you had done.

CB Of course, I'm asking these questions out of my own ignorance.

HS I think that I met more rough people, maybe on the transport, such as when I was on the transport from Prague to Berlin or the one to Prague - especially the one from Prague to Berlin. In this prison transport, there was a few days, maybe, when it was rough, but it was such a mixture of people. There were Russian prisoners and French prisoners - a lot of Russian prisoners and political prisoners. I don't really have any idea what the people did or why they were on these transports. There was a rather good comradery among the people. There really was no rough play or anything.

CB Now, another intangible question. In retrospect, you say that surviving in part meant looking out for your-

self and not worrying about anyone else?

HS Yes!

CB Would you say that was true at the beginning, back in '37, '38, '39, '40, or that that grew?

HS No. In '37, '38 you led a fairly normal life.

CB Well, even after the war started, let's say late '39, '40 - what I'm saying... what I'm asking is, did this, and I don't want to use the word selfishness, appear?

HS Why not use the word.

CB Because it implies something else than what I mean.

HS Well, we were. We really were.

CB But was there a growing selfishness? Did it exist from the beginning? Did it grow? Or was it not there? Now in a sense, you may not realize it, but you are contradicting yourself, because in an earlier interview I asked you about looking out for yourself and being concerned about others and you replied that always everyone had the concern of others.

HS I said that?

CB Yes. You were talking about your days in Berlin and Vienna when you were in hiding. You may think I am being mean to you as far as this question goes...

HS No! I don't have any recollection of it.

CB Well, I think it related particularly to your hiding in Vienna, and people taking other people in. You were talking about the lady who let you live in the apartment in the back.

HS Oh! These are two different things.

CB Well, now, that's what I can't separate in my mind. She was taking a risk for you. She was not looking out for herself.

HS Ah, that was a different thing. I'm talking right now about Jew against Jew.

CB Oh, well, I'm talking about people.

HS Now, these are two different things. I am talking right now of a camp situation - not living in society, where interaction was fairly normal, as it is today. I mean you saw people - if somebody needed some money and you had some money, you gave them some money. You helped them. That was what I'm talking about, but when your life is in question... I am talking about, not the

social amenities which were in a camp, but that if you had food or you were able to get some extra food, you would not share it with somebody else. You would eat it yourself. There is nothing wrong with sharing it with someone else, but your first responsibility is to yourself. But my point in asking this is whether that interest in oneself existed from very early or whether it grew with the situation?

HS The situations were not comparable. You cannot compare a prison or camp situation with a situation outside in freedom. These are two completely different things. If you were outside, there were selfish people and unselfish people. In camp, there were mostly selfish people, and if somebody was not selfish, he didn't last very long. I was on a transport and when I jumped out of the train, I jumped out of the train well-knowing that maybe my jumping out of the train might cost the life of somebody else. That's what I'm talking about.

CB Yes. Did you witness any selfless acts in prison, in the hospital, in transports?

HS No. There really were none. I can't say that there was any such situation. There was no catastrophe somewhere where somebody jumps into the flames to save a burning child.

CB I am talking about the kinds of acts that one reads

about in connection, for example, with the Polish doctor who headed the orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto. When, for example, the children who were his wards were rounded up to go to Auschwitz, he went with them.

HS Well, I have to tell you, no. I never noticed anything like this. I never witnessed anything like this. These things happen - I would honor these people as much as possible. I hope Israel or another country can do or did this either during their lives or posthumously. But these were, unfortunately, very, very rare occasions. To witness something like this would have been rather like winning the Irish Sweepstakes.

CB Another thing that intrigues me: now, I'm going to change the subject since I've probed enough on that...

HS I like to think about it. I like to think back about it, but sometimes my mind is not very clear on many things.

CB The reputation of the various camps...you seem to have known what Auschwitz meant, what Treblinka might have meant, what Bergen-Belsen was. You seemed to know that Theresienstadt was a little bit better.. Now how did this word get around?

HS I don't know. I knew what Auschwitz meant when I left Hungary. I did not hear about Bergen-Belsen until I was

in Berlin. This, I remember very well, in the Gestapo prison since Dobberke came to some people and said they are going to Bergen-Belsen and that it was a very nice place.

CB Well, what about Theresienstadt? You seemed to have known before you went to Theresienstadt that that was a safer place.

HS I don't know. I heard about things - you talk to people. I don't know exactly how. Theresienstadt was publicized, of course. The Germans made a point of publicizing Theresienstadt, too, so that might be it, but exactly how we knew about everything... I'm sure that we learned about it somehow - I just don't remember how.

CB Now let's come back to the point where I started interrupting and that is the Russian liberation of Theresienstadt and your determination to get away as soon as you possibly could - two days after liberation. Now, could you begin to recount the details of that? Do you want to go on a little while longer or are you tired?

HS I am fine. As I said, the Russian liberation was a mixed thing - we were very, very happy, of course, that they came and we were very grateful, etc., but it was the kind of a let down, I think, more than anything

else. I think they had a somewhat of a "so-what" attitude, and as I say, they considered us kind of a nuisance. "Keep away. Keep away." And, of course, it was the beginning. The Russians were not any worse, as it turned out later, than the Americans were. I mean, many of the American generals regarded these camps as breeding places of crime and vermins and diseases, and they would have liked nothing better than to bomb them out of existence. Now I agree that these places were not pleasant and they must have been quite a nuisance in the ordered lives of the military. But it was the liberation and the post-war world were a let down and a disappointment - I don't think only to me. We hear it from other people, too. I got on a truck with a number of Czechs. The Czechs were the first allowed to leave. I was not really allowed to leave, but I got myself a Red Cross paper from Theresienstadt and I got a release from the hospital, from Dr. Neuhaus, that he didn't need me anymore - this you had to have or you were not allowed to leave. And we went to Prague - there was still shooting all around when you drove down the road that there were still little nests of Germans around. I went to Prague and got to the railroad station and wanted to go to Vienna. I didn't have anywhere else to go at that time. Berlin was impossible! There had not been a train yet. The place was full with partisans who told in detail how they hung the Gestapo by the feet and burned them. I had a paper from Theresienstadt, on the other hand, and I made a point of it since I was

supposed to be English, so I spoke German with a heavy English accent. I thought, "if I speak one clear word of German, I'll be in the soup." They spoke German to me after they found out that they couldn't speak English to me. I spoke English to them. They didn't understand English, so finally, I said, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" or "Sprichst Du Deutsch?" (Do you speak German?). They said, "Oh, ein bisschen" (a little), and since they wanted to talk to me, we spoke in German. It must have been a terrible effort for them, you know. I told myself, "If I speak one correct word of German, they're going to hang me up by the feet." So after awhile, there was a group of former English prisoners from camp. I joined them. I felt a little bit more at ease, at that time, with them. Then, the first train came. That first train went to a place called Ceske Budejovice (48.58N,14.29E). It was more or less in the direction I wanted to go, so I got on the train and we went there. It took a long time to go there. I got there with a family. They started to set up a lot of committees and still the Germans were around there. They were still shooting around. The committees were the start of local government. You know, there was no government. Everything started during the first couple of days. I went to one of these committees and they received me very, very nicely and put me up with a family. I got fed much better than I had been fed in a long time.

CB Was this a Jewish family?

HS No, no, no. There were no Jews. There were no Jews left in the province. I mean not one. The Germans had seen to that. Eventually, I wanted to get on. I had nothing to do in Ceské Budejovice. My host found for me a convoy of Russian trucks going somewhere near Vienna, not even in Vienna, but near Vienna. I went with them and I got into one of the trucks and they took me along. Now, also, our communications, of course, were somewhat difficult at times, but they spoke a little German. They had a whole lot of German spam-type stuff in the back of the truck - and jams - the horrible artificial jam they had - that, and wine - barrels of wine. The wine was too sour for them, so they put sugar into it - lots of sugar. I weighed about 100 pounds or 110 pounds I think, at that time, when I got out of Theresienstadt, so I didn't look so good. I was sitting there and they were very good hearted people and they came to me with food - big pieces of bread with big slices of spam in it; there was bread with marmalade and spam and the jam and big slices of bread with wine and the sugar and they gave it to me and said, "Ess! Ess! Ess! Drink!" (Eat! Eat! Eat! Drink!). They really stuffed it into me. I was lying in the front of that cab, and I thought I was going to die... I thought, "I had survived this whole sad mess, and now I'm going to die in the front of a Russian cab of a Russian truck." I felt like dying - I felt terrible - I was very, very sick for a long time.

Eventually, we got to the outskirts of Vienna. They were going on and I had to find some alternate way of transportation. I got off the truck and we parted very lovingly, and before I know it, I was picked up by another, less loving truck, again with Russians. They were picking up people who came from camps and from forced labor camps, and everybody they could, to take them to one of their camps. And from there, they were going to take them to Russia. I was in that truck! I thought, "No, I don't like that at all. I'm not going to go!" I told the people that I was English. That didn't impress them at all. Finally, we drove on. I was on the outside of the truck. It was a pickup truck - a panel truck. I was on the outside, standing there when we drove by a building on the outskirts of Vienna, with a big English flag, the Union Jack, hanging down. I saw that Union Jack and I told that driver, "That's my building!" Then, I jumped off the truck and I ran towards the Union Jack, but the building was locked. In the meantime, he didn't know what to do. He probably contemplated that either he could shoot me or he could get me back or just drive on. It was easier, I suppose, to just drive on. So, he drove on, and I was standing there. There was a fellow near the house there, and I don't know what connection he had with England. I don't remember! I think his wife was English or something, but it was a very good house to find, for he had an apartment there and he wanted somehow to get it protected from the Russians, of course. He had a woman

living in there with a husband at the German front, a German, you know! The Russians were in the building, too. They had some apartments. He wanted to have the house protected. Now, he thought, "An English fellow, that's beautiful! He's going to protect my apartment!" So he gave me the apartment. So I moved in. The trouble was that the day after I moved in, I got dysentery. I had dysentery in the worst way. I was sick like a dog and they had to take me to the hospital. I think that was the closest call I had in the whole time - the dysentery, that was, after I came back! I got out of the hospital and went back to the apartment. What I really did then, it's not very clear to me. I raised some money. I know this, but how, I don't know. I have not very many recollections of exactly what I did for it. I know that I wanted to go to London. This was my next step - I wanted to go to England. I had an uncle there - my mother's brother, and there was absolutely no connection of mail or telephone - that didn't exist. There were no connections, whatsoever. There was complete breakdown of everything after the war. Besides Vienna was completely Russian occupied and they stole everything which wasn't nailed down, and it was not the most healthy place to be - not the most pleasant place. I mean, there was absolutely nothing to eat, absolutely nothing in town. If they didn't buy on the black market the people really were starving in Vienna. There were a couple of episodes - later it was denied - but I know it happened - where human flesh was being eaten. It was a

very, very bad - extremely bad time. People were living on 700 calories or something like that. It was the normal diet. That is not very much to live on - particularly if you worked. Anyway, I wanted to get out of Vienna. I ran, somehow, into a fellow from South Africa, either a Dutchman or a German (I don't recall what he was) - but he had a South African passport. He had a British passport. His name was Hans Heinrich Kristoph von Giser. He, I am quite sure, had been a collaborator. Probably a Nazi and a collaborator. However, we got along quite well and we were of help to each other up to a certain point. He had a British passport, which was impressive to a lot of people, and I had concentration camp papers, which was impressive to another set of people. So we complemented each other pretty well... So to get to England, the closest place where there was no Russian occupancy, since you couldn't get over the line to Linz (48.18N,14.18E) - it was just impossible to get over there... but you could get to Prague and from Prague you could get to Pilsen (49.45N, 13.24E) and Pilsen was American. So we went to Prague and stayed in Prague for a few days until we got a permit. The line was just being established. The Americans were just moving into Pilsen then. In Pilsen, we went to the British consulate. It was established the very day we got there, or the day before. The consul had not the remotest idea about what to do. He couldn't find his bathroom yet! We approached him. We wanted to go to London and I told him, of course, that I was Eng-

lish, too - I was Henry Brook, still. He was most impressed. He didn't know what to do! He didn't know what was front or what was back. He gave us a paper to get on a military transport to London. So we went to what was the airport then, and went - got on a military transport to London. I think the plane was a DC-3.

(The following description makes the plane appear more like a Piper Cub.) It was a small plane with bucket seats along the sides and windows with the kind of rubber stoppers in them which always fell out. It was miserably cold in that plane. It had no heat! We went to England in a very, very rough flight. I was sick like a dog, I remember. It was very rough! When we came down, I couldn't hear a thing. They had not pressurized the plane, of course. We got to immigration, and I made a mistake there. I still maintained that I was Henry Brook. I should have known that I couldn't keep it up there - I mean, that it was nonsense to keep it up in England, I mean. They can find out easily enough... Well, Hans Heinrich Kristoph von Giser was taken somewhere - I don't know where they took him. I never saw him again! I was taken to another interment camp in Wimbleton. It was a nice place. We had movies twice a week and we played poker and we got a lot of tea - not much to eat, but a lot of tea. It wasn't a bad place! (The English also were on short rations in 1945.)

CB After all you'd be through?

HS Then, the immigration people came - the Scotland Yard people (it is most doubtful that Scotland Yard had anything to do with HS's papers). I don't know which branch or who interrogated me. They made a big deal out of the fact that I came in as Henry Brook. "Why did I say I was Henry Brook?" and "How did I know Henry Brook" and I said, "I don't know Henry Brook. I made him up," and they said, "It is not true that you made it up." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "There's a Henry Brook with your birthdate right here in London." Then they asked me: "Did you make broadcasts for the Germans? Did you do this? Did you do this?" You know, they didn't trust me for one moment. The upshot was that they took me to the airport and they put me on a plane and they sent me back.

CB So you were in England for how long? About a week?

HS No, longer than that. I would say maybe three weeks, or two weeks. My uncle couldn't do a thing. You see, my uncle was never naturalized.

CB Had you been able to contact him?

HS No, no!

CB He didn't know you were there?

HS I guess that he knew that I was there. I gave his name

and address to the people. I gave his last address and his name, so I guess they did contact him. Exactly what ever happened, I never found out, because before I got back to England, my uncle died. So they took me to a plane and they deported me. They said that they would send me to Brussels and the bastards sent me to Prague. In Prague, because somebody deported from England can't be any good, I was arrested by the Czechs. It's so ridiculous when you think back to it - when you think back to the whole thing! I was put in a Czech camp. I was rubbing shoulders - I was rubbing elbows or whatever you rub in camps, with Germans - with honest to goodness Nazis! I didn't like this at all and I made a big scene. They separated me then somewhat and I got somewhat better treatment. I don't know how or why, but I wasn't there very long. It still must have been two weeks, three weeks or four weeks. There was an Austrian repatriation commission which came, and eventually, I was able - I became Heinz Stieber again at that point or I had become it already, I don't know. I'll have to look up the papers. I have to look at what point I became Heinz Stieber. I don't remember. In the repatriation commission, I got to talk to a communist recruiter. No, there were two who wanted to know whether I was a communist, and I assured them that I was not, and they lost interest in me! Then the repatriation group came and then I got back to Vienna. When I did get back to Vienna, it was 1945.

CB The repatriation committee... you told them the story of how you had been getting around.

HS Oh, yes, yes.

CB They believed you this time?

HS Well, I had all the papers. It wasn't hard to prove my identity as Heinz Stieber. It wasn't hard to prove! There was Israelitische Kulturgemeinde (The Jewish Culture Community)... there was the City Hall with the papers. I was there. There was no problem proving it. It was a little hard to prove that I was Henry Brook, but Heinz Stieber was not hard to prove. I was born in Vienna. Especially if you were born in Vienna, there was no problem. The people who were not born in Vienna - they had problems. The people who were born in Bruck-
ander Leitha (48.01N,16.46E), or other hinterlands - they had a problem. So I got back to Vienna and I got a job. It must have been just after the Americans. The Americans came very shortly after the Russians. Vienna was split into four zones at that time, or shortly afterwards. Anyhow, I became storekeeper in an officers' mess.

CB British or American?

HS American. The British had nothing to eat. The American was much better. And I was there for I don't know

how long - I don't remember the timetable exactly.

Later, I took a job as a manager of an officers' mess - a different one. Being the manager of an officer's mess was a good job mainly because the American officers were very poor poker players and I was a good poker player, so the income was fairly regular there. That was our main occupation - playing poker. I had a fairly regular income from the poker games in dollars. It was script, probably. I don't remember. I don't think it was dollars - it was probably script - but it was still enough to get something from the PX. (Americans generally did not care how much they lost at the poker table since black market money from cigarettes, etc. was plentiful and you could not ship it stateside without finding a loser who would attest that he lost the money.) And whatever we got from the PX was good money - that means, it was good money if sold in Vienna.

CB Had you been trying to re-establish contact with old Viennese friends of the family or had you already found them?

HS I tell you that there was nobody left. Not a soul left.

CB But you did actively seek to find them?

HS Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Well, I tell you, yes, I did! However, how active I really was, I don't know. I don't think that I had, at that time, a great desire, strange-

ly enough, to find other people. I have the feeling that I didn't. I was so busy with walking out of my room and out of my building, just to feel that I could walk out whenever I wanted to. I just would walk out and go around the block and come back and then I would walk out again and go around, walk around the block and come back just because of the feeling. It was the greatest thing for me that I could walk out anytime I wanted to. That I could go out in the street anytime I wanted. I don't really know whether I was looking forward awfully much to finding and therefore to trying too much to find somebody. I don't know.

CB I think we should probably stop at this point.

HS OK!

cs Interview of Mr. Henry Steeber. It is Friday, March the 16th (1979) and we're in the living room of his apartment. Mr. Steeber, at the end of the last tape you were talking about your work in the - what would you call it - commissary? dining room? in the American mess?

HS Oh, yes! That is right.

CB I got you off the subject after that and was asking you about your attempts to locate friends and family after the war was over, and you had said that, yes, you did try, that you don't know now how actively you tried.

HS Well, I tried, of course. I tried to see whether I would hear anything from my parents - I never thought that I would. From what I knew about Riga (56.57N, 24.06E - this was an "extermination camp", notoriously so), about the first transport to Riga by that time, somehow, we knew that none of these people survived - really, the people who got in January '42 to Riga... My grandmother went to Theresienstadt. While I was in Theresienstadt I never could find any record of her and so... I had some relatives in Buenos Aires. I got into contact with them. My uncle in England, of course - he had had a hard time. It really was a sad, sad thing, because before the war, he had a fairly good position. I think that it was a mistake that he never became a British citizen or a British subject, whatever you can become (however, it was not easy). It was more advantageous I think, for taxes, at that time. He was interred during the war for a good part of the war. After the war, he never was able to re-establish himself, really. He lived on a very reduced income and I think he talked himself into being an old man. He always had the habit of considering himself an old man, when he was 25. So he talked himself into aging rapidly, I think, and this is what he did. He developed, suddenly, some kind of muscle illness - nobody knew, really, at that time, what it was. I don't know today what it was either. Some muscles were diseased and malfunctioned in his legs or in one leg. Anyhow, he couldn't walk. It was very hard

for him to walk and he couldn't walk after a while, at all, I think. Then they put him in a hospital and he contracted pneumonia and he died. So that was the last blood relative I had in the world.

CB Did his wife survive him?

HS Yes! Yes!

CB Did you try to contact her?

HS We did not have a great lot of admiration for one another. We always thought that she was quite smitten with Hitler for awhile. She was a Christian. Of course, as you can see in the beginning, that was the fault of my family who looked down on her when they were married. So, I don't think she ever could quite forget that, either, so it was an element of utter dislike.

CB Well, I remember that you said that, at one point in your travels, you had gone to her family for refuge and they had not been very receptive.

HS That is correct.

CB How long were you with the American army officers' mess?

HS Until somewhere in late '46, I think. Then I went with the Joint Distribution Committee (this is actually the

American Joint Distribution Committee). I don't even know how I got there anymore, but somehow I got to them and got a job working for this Jewish self help agency.'

CB In Vienna?

HS In Vienna. I just found an old, old slide (photograph) of my boss and me standing before a Jeep in Vienna. Somehow I got recommended to the Joint Distribution Committee, which was the biggest Jewish relief organization at that time. There were two of them working, the HIAS (HIAS is the abbreviation for the Hebrew Immigrants Aid Society) and the Joint (the Joint was the highest). Much of Joint's work later was taken over by UNRA (the United Nations Relief Association). At first, I was a kind of secretary to the Director of the Joint, a Joe Silver from Cleveland. He was a lawyer from Cleveland. Before he left, I did a little translation work and dealt with people coming to the Joint - you know, the chap who sits in the anteroom and deals with everything? That was me! Later, I became a photographer. Again, I think it was my own volition - I'm sure of it, because I was getting quite sick and tired of being a secretary. It was a good job for a crook, to be such a secretary. That was a strange thing, but it was a good job for a crook. I never could bring myself to do it (to be a crook). I got packages of CARE certificates to distribute - blank ones, you

know. People just bought for ten dollars whatever was in a CARE package and Americans sent it over. So, we got this whole package of CARE certificates - whole packages came in. We would distribute them. We would get them distributed to whoever we thought should get them. I know that in some other places, there was tremendous trade in these CARE packages. (Continued on T458 P1.)

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY OF HENRY STEEBER

SIDE 8 (Tape 4, Side 2)

Continued from Tape 4, Side 7, Page 24, without interruption

From the people who received it, you know that each CARE package just after the war was worth actually a junior fortune in some trading commodity. I never was able to do it, I mean, maybe I didn't know any better. I think that I was pretty naive in these days... pretty stupid... still thinking of the golden future or something. Anyhow, I became a photographer for the Joint. I did some publicity work. I just found some the other day and I'm going to show it to you later. (Actually, much black market activities were centered around CARE packages, but many welfare workers refused to participate in them. Fines were also heavy.)

CB I'd like to see that, yes.

HS I always find boxes and I take them out, and something comes up about which I didn't even think for ages. So, we travelled to Displaced Person camps (i.e., DP camps) in Austria. We travelled all over Austria, but there were quite a number in the American Zone, there were some in the English Zone, there were none in the French Zone. There was one big one in Admont (47.34N, 14.27E). There are some nice pictures here from Admont. Then I

left.

CB Let me ask you a question or two about this. Now you worked with the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). You say you were doing just general clerical work, translation and so forth, but what was the main thrust of the JDC at that time? Was it locating people or was it getting food to people?

HS Neither.

CB Or was it getting people to Israel? (It was still Palestine and immigrations were nearly closed.)

HS Well, it was a mixture of all of them. There were camps in Austria - refugee camps in Austria - the DP camps. They were supported partly by the army - monies from the army, and partly by private funds. The main distributor of private funds was the JDC. The JDC started a number of projects in the camps. Their idea was to make people self-sufficient to a certain degree, not let them sit around the whole day thinking up unpleasantries. So they started a work program and encouraged people to join. They brought tools in and materials and encouraged people to open workshops: tailor, carpenter, etc. and to manufacture certain things and these things were sold in the camp PX for script. The people who worked would earn script for their work in the workshops. This script they could use in the PX to buy back the merchan-

dise, also the merchandise they produced themselves. Of course, they could go outside and buy money for script and go to town. I mean, they were not locked into the camps. They could go outside, but, of course, the local government and the JDC, more or less, discouraged too many excursions outside. I mean they couldn't lock them in. Of course, there was friction. It was easy to have friction between the local population and the camp inmates, but comparatively, there was not much. I remember some unpleasantnesses in some camps, especially one camp. That was mostly, I think, provoked by the Jews more than by the local population.

CB Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

HS Oh, I would say that they would walk along and would stop people and say "Umhoch!", which means friend - "Uster Umhoch!" If they didn't understand, then they would give them a kick or something like this ... just nastiness, you know, which, of course, is born out of great frustration - you know, these people sitting in these camps! By that time, it was early '47, '48, '49, maybe - I don't know. I was not in there after '49, so I don't know what happened. The war was over in '45 and nothing was happening. After '48, it started to empty out into Israel, but before '48, nothing was happening. Nobody wanted them. No country wanted them. Israel was closed. There was illegal immigration, of course. Some undertook trips to get into Israel. Yes, there were

quite a few people, there was quite a bit of traffic in people being smuggled. I met some people, also people from the Jewish underground armies (the Irgun - the illegal terrorist groups), but mostly they tried to bring people in. To smuggle people in.

CB The photography work that you did, was that mainly in the line of public relations? Publicity for the manufacturing and the PX store?

HS Exactly. Mostly. Also to show off general conditions in the camps. If you wanted to tug at the heart strings, there were always ways to tug at heart strings, to show this.

CB Which agency was mainly concerned with finding people, putting families back together, locating people?

HS I think it was mostly in Aronson. I don't remember the exact location, but it was over there in Germany. I think it was mostly a Red Cross agency. You mean a Jewish agency?

CB Yes, surely. There must have been some central office, some administration where people could inquire about relatives.

HS The only one I would know was the Red Cross. They had a search service; a central search service. Let me try to

remember where that was.

CB In Berlin?

HS No. Not in Germany! Not in Berlin! In Arosa (41.47N, 9.40E) I think it was. (Arosa is a resort town located in Switzerland.)

CB You never got involved in that work?

HS No.

CB Would you comment on the administration of the JDC in Vienna, on Silver, for example.

HS Silver was a lawyer and after that there was a fellow named Traub! I think he was a lawyer, too. His name was spelled "T R A U B", I think. Look, you have evil people, in their way, as administrators, but when you have a lot of easy money around, you have corruption. There's no question about it. I don't know how much Silver stole and I don't know how much Traub stole, really. I'm quite sure they did steal, though. I know that there was one chap in charge of the work program and he started it while I was there. He was able to buy up a lot of art in Austria and ship it back to the United States. Again, I have never stood next to any of them and saw them put their hand into the till, but I am convinced that some money went the wrong way. I am not

quite as convinced now, maybe than I was then, even, but it is the old story. So, they didn't get 90 cents on the dollar or something like that - they get 50 cents on the dollar. But if it wouldn't have been there, they wouldn't have gotten anything. It's the old story with charities. It's unfortunate what happens sometimes, but if it's not there you are getting less. Who gets burned is usually really the people who shouldn't be: the recipients. But, I don't think that it was more corrupt, that more was stolen than was normal under these circumstances. I say that I never could pinpoint it, where it was done and how exactly it was done. I know that there was a lot of money disbursed and I think that the control of this money which was received and disbursed was very, very loose.

CB Well, you know, this is very interesting to me. I've not read much material on it. It may exist and I just don't know about it, but to my knowledge, I don't know that much exists on this period after the war and down to the creation of Israel in '48 and the big waves of immigration in '48 and '49 to Israel: the emptying of the camps. I've not really seen much authoritative information on the displaced persons camps in that three or four year period. So any detail that you can give, any memories that you can summon about all sorts of activities would be good, for example: health care in the camps, any details about the administration of JDC

or the work of HIAS, or conflicting jurisdictions between HIAS and JDC, or work of Irgun (this was one of the secret armies of terrorism) and their agents, your contacts with them and who they were by name. I would be very appreciative for that kind of detail.

HS I don't know anything about that. You see, I was on the fringes. I was not really involved. First of all, don't forget, in all American post-war institutions there was one great division: the division between Americans and what was kindly called Indigenous Personnel. If you belonged to the Indigenous Personnel, regardless of who you were, you were a second class citizens to start with. I mean there were no questions asked - you were a second class. Then within that second class, you might have been top second class or middle second class or bottom second class.

CB Well, see, even that's important. Even that kind of information is important to me. So you're on the right track, in other words.

HS Well, OK, there were non-Americans involved in decision making or policy making in any of the organizations, so all I can tell you is from a second-class point of view. So, from a peripheral point of view...

CB But, that's important.

HS I do not think that there was an affection between HIAS and Joint. I don't think it was overlapping anywhere. It must have been, but I don't know. I never saw it. there was some friction later between UNRA and Joint. Between the United Nations Relief Organization and Joint there were some overlapping authorities in the camps, I think. The administration was very simple: there was a director and there was a secretary and there was a medical department and a work project department. These were really the main functions of Joint together with Emigration, but there was, of course, an emigration administrative staff which concerned itself with emigration. But, in the camps the main functions of Joint were medical and work.

CB Now, I assume that your knowledge pertains more to the work end of it than to the medical, since you were serving as a photographer.

HS Yes, I made a little booklet. Where will I find it? ... You might be interested in it. It is called "My Child". As a photographer, I did it with some other people. We have very simple steps to show what you do with a baby for the DP's, the refugees.

CB Did you have much contact with the DP's themselves - on a one-to-one basis?

HS Yes, well, not really too much. We'd get into the camp.

We'd talk to them, of course. One thing was the language, of course. My Yiddish is nearly nonexistent.

CB So you were dealing mostly with Polish refugees in Austrian camps. See, that was the next question I was going to ask. Was that the provenance of the geography of displacement?

HS Yes, there were Polish, Russian, Rumanian - mostly refugees from Eastern Europe.

CB Would you say that was true also in the German camps - that it was mostly Eastern Europeans?

HS Well, I tell you, the French Jews - there weren't many left of the French Jews - the French Jews and the Dutch Jews and of other Western Jews - there was very little left - much less even than of the Eastern Jews. Mainly because there were more (Eastern Jews) so the percentage, the probability was higher to survive. But there was nobody left. So the few, the few who might have been left - they went back to France, they went back to Denmark, and they went back to Holland and so on, but they were assured of either a friendly or, at least, an acceptable reception. Actually, the Danes kept the property of the Jews very carefully and gave it back after the war, very carefully. They, of course, were the only ones who did it! The others were not so happy when the Jews came back - the ones who survived. There was not a

great joy in many places. So the only people really who were left for camps were the people from the East. They couldn't go back to Poland or they wouldn't go back to Poland. They couldn't or wouldn't go back to Russia. They wouldn't go to Rumania, you know, they wouldn't go back to any communist country.

CB You stayed with JDC 'til 1949?

HS Until 1949, Yes.

CB As a photographer?

HS As a photographer.

CB Then, what happened? What was the next step?

HS In '48 the DP laws were passed in the United States. That means that a large quota, a large number of DP's were allowed to enter the U.S. I wanted to go to the U.S. I didn't even know whether I wanted to stay, truthfully. "It doesn't cost me anything - the government pays for it... Why shouldn't I go?" That is what I thought.

CB Had you not thought of going to Israel?

HS No! For some reason, no. It was just not the thing. You see, my family had no Zionist background, nor did I.

My family was completely assimilationist. I was very happy with Israel, but I just didn't have any feeling - I never had any feeling of going there.

CB Why was Argentina eliminated in your mind? You had relatives in Buenos Aires.

HS Oh, I didn't want to go to Argentina. I think relatives are nice, but you would not necessarily follow them this way. No, no, no! I wanted to go and it was made so easy to go to the 'States. It didn't cost anything. The government picked up the tab for the transportation and all. Truman did a tremendous thing there, with the DP laws. It was enormous. There were a lot of people going, after all. The urge to go to Israel - I think it became much stronger in later years. Then, in 1948, it was very new. There was - the war was on. (The State of Israel was in great danger, since about 7 Arab countries invaded the Jewish State within one week of its establishment.) There was fighting going on. Things were quite unsettled, but this was not a reason. It just never occurred to me to go to Israel. I didn't have any intention of going to Israel. I don't know, maybe I am anti-Semitic, myself. I don't know. Too many Jews, you know, in that State.

CB I don't think that translates into any sort of anti-Semitism - that you'd prefer going to the 'States rather than Israel.

HS I was thinking about settling in Vienna. Why I was thinking that, I don't know, either, for I really didn't want to. Possibly to open a business - somebody suggested it, or I wanted to do it myself - to open a photo store - a retail store. So I looked into the possibility of opening a retail store. Now to open any retail store - number one, you have to prove to the satisfaction of something like a Chamber of Commerce, let us say, that you are proficient in your business; number two, you have to find a store which is willing and a location where you can rent a store; number three, you have to go on the same side, a certain distance, and get the "OK" of every store owner that it is all right for you to open a store, and on the other side of the street, you have to go a certain distance and get an "OK" from every store owner; number four, your store has to be, I don't know how many kilometers - from the next store of the same type. Taken altogether, it comes to eventually telling the people exactly what they can do with their store. I think it's really ridiculous! For me, it was absolutely unbearable - the amount of bureaucracy and red tape and a narrowness in Europe at that time. This was, I think, really, the main reason why I decided to go to the 'States.

CB Before we take up the story of your coming to the 'States, can I ask you again about sentiments - emotions. I should think that a person who had survived

emotionally would probably be rather fragile. Looking back, do you recall having to really grapple with or come to grips with or handle biases and prejudices, anti-German feelings, anti-Austrian feelings, anti-Gentile feelings?

HS In myself?

CB In yourself. Obviously, you have overcome them, if you ever had them.

HS To tell you the truth, I don't think I ever had them in any degree. I don't think so! I think that I was brought up that way: to abhor any kind of generalization, to infer from one case, from one instance, to generalize from one instance - a general condition from that to infer a general condition. Of course, I had a certain uneasy feeling, I'm sure. I tell you that I came back to Austria and Germany in 1958 and I think I had a much uneasier feeling in 1958 than I had in 1948. I saw much more of the resurgence. You see, in 1948, nobody was a Nazi - Oh, God "Nazi" was a dirty word. Nobody ever heard of anybody who was a Nazi. And if anybody would have said, "Jews have flat feet!" somebody else would have hit him over the head immediately, you know. It was different. There was too much reaction, yet, from the war. Then a few years later, that softened somewhat and the good old Austrian anti-Semitism came out again. It was not expressed as

strongly, but it was there. It was this kind of insidious slime crawling around everywhere. It is hard to see - hard to express: "Eglicher Jude!" (Jewish Leech!) or "Sau Jude!" (Jewish sow). Nobody did this. There was a certain - a certain slime - all over the place. Maybe it was in your mind. Maybe much of it was in the mind. I don't know. But, in 1958, I said, "I couldn't live here." Well, now, I know I couldn't live there anymore or anything. If you ask me why, I will say, "I don't know." Nobody came to me as a Jew. Nobody! These same characters are coming up again - raising their heads again.

CB Well, one more question before we get you off to America. Did you have any contact with the authorities who were involved with war crimes in identifying, tracing, documenting in any way?

HS No. No!

CB Was that of your own choice?

HS Nobody asked me, I think. You know, there were not so many people there. There were no Wiesenthals there. (Reference is made to Simon Wiesenthal, the Nazi hunter who has established his worldwide hunting headquarters in Los Angeles: the Simon Wiesenthal Center.) I never heard of Wisenthal before I came to the United States.

CB He is Austrian, isn't he? Or is he German?

HS No. He is Hungarian, I think - as far as I know. I think he is Hungarian, originally, but maybe not. Nobody asked me.

CB You felt no strong urge to prosecute? You didn't want to see Dobberke on trial?

HS Well, I didn't really know what to try him for; except that he hit a few people a number of times - that he mistreated people sometimes, but I never saw him kill a man. There were so many people there who were much worse than he was. Also, in Theresienstadt, people who were much, much worse than he ever was, fortunately: Himmler (reference is made to SS Chief Heinrich Himmler who committed suicide shortly after his arrest on May 23, 1945) and so on - they got them. They hanged most of these. This was giving satisfaction, but not very much. I found out that it really doesn't do much for you. Revenge is beautiful, I think, when you think of it and it falls very flat when it's accomplished. So I never had any great satisfaction from any of it. I remember that after, just after the liberation, that they brought in some German women or German men to clean up Theresienstadt. They picked them up from the countryside. They brought them in and let them clean. And not one person would lift a finger against them - one, maybe - a Russian soldier did, but nobody else - not a

Jew, for sure. So it's not what you dream. You fantasize, you dream what you would do and, fortunately, or unfortunately, I don't know which, reality is quite different when it comes to it. And as I said, the whole post-war situation, the post-war life, it was a let down for most people - a terrible let down. After you went through all these things and saved yourself - you saved your life somehow, and then you find someone in the world who is politely regretful that you saved your life. I think that for a great many people it would have been much easier if you would have died, you know - that sort of thing. Then they could stand and cry a big tear and say, "how terrible" and go home and everything is peaceful and they don't have people around who remind them constantly of this - of these things. No, I am convinced, and I am becoming more and more convinced, of it, that the Jews made a great mistake to survive, as far as just the world around them is concerned. That is the case here, too. If you ask people here what they would prefer - if the Jews would go away suddenly, then there would be no more problem at all. The Mideast would be a great, happy Arab family, without Jews! Now, wouldn't it be easier? Ask this question and find out how many people would say yes.

CB That's a provocative, and what do I want to say..
damning indictment.

HS Well, it's hard to bear. You see, I think that I still

can feel and keep fairly objective! I'm fairly objective about it. I feel that I am not being terribly bitter about it - maybe bitter to a certain degree, but I think it's a fact.

CB Yes! Well, what month, what part of 1949 did you leave?

HS November.

CB November! Late 1949... How much red tape was involved?

HS Well, that went fairly fast. You see, the Joint expedited it after I made up my mind. It went fairly fast for the immigration visa - you filled out a few forms. I think it was not very much even then. Their only concern was that you didn't have a Communist past. I think if you were a mass murderer, at that time, it was much more admissible than being a Communist. It went pretty fast. And I went to Bremerhafen (53.33N, 8.35E) from some staging area near Salzburg - and went to Bremerhafen and I came on... I came on the General JH MacRay - one of these "General" ships - the Liberty ships.

CB Transport ship? (The "General" and "Admiral" class ships were used to transport US Troops during W.W. II).

HS Yes. Now, there were about three times as many people on there than there should have been. It was terribly, terribly overcrowded. Three layers of bodies and it was

during November, and we got into some God awful storms. It was the most miserable weather - thirteen days! Thirteen days from Bremerhafen to New York! Some of the most miserable days I've ever seen, with furniture just going from one side to the other - the ships' screw out of the water half the time. You thought that the ship would fall apart, it was shaking so badly. It was very, very miserable. But, we made it. We came here on Thanksgiving, 1949. We had to stay outside the harbor for a day because there was no customs and immigration service that day and wait until the next day. I came to New York on the - I don't even know what day it was - the twenty-third of November or the twenty-fifth of November - I don't know what date it was when I came, but it was in 1949.

CB That's funny. I didn't think that customs closed down on holidays.

HS I don't know whether customs closed down, but the immigration closed down. "The DP's are there now. Well, who cares? Why should we forgo a turkey dinner for them?"

CB Well, you had about 2,000 people on that ship. (That was a normal load for a "General" class ship.) Did you make any friends on the ship that have been lasting?

HS No. I didn't know anybody on that ship.

CB And you had no contacts in New York, or did you?

HS No. I had no contacts in New York. I had absolutely none. I had the Joint. I went to the Joint. They owed me something which seemed to be a large sum then, for some reason - I don't know why - I think from my last payment or something. They owed me something like \$50, which was, to me, then, a very large sum of money, so I went to Madison Avenue. It was one of my first trips to collect it. I had a very rough time. I don't know... It was 1949... It was very bad - it was a recession.

CB I honestly don't remember.

HS Yeah, but it was - there was a recession in '49. The Joint was only overseas. They didn't do anything in the United States. There was a United Service for New Americans on Park Row in New York, downtown. They registered you and they tried to get you a job and you should have seen it! I wanted to be a photographer, but you should see it - Of course, I would accept something else, too, I suppose. I don't know what I would have done. But you should see the jobs they send you to! Some were on the Lower East Side. One was with an old man in a store - in a filthy old store - filled up with old furs or something, I remember. And he wanted me to do something. When you got in there, you started sneezing already, when you opened the door. He had work

that nobody else would touch - Nobody in his right mind! - Americans or immigrants or nobody in his right mind would touch. So eventually, as I think I told you, I found a job as a baby photographer.

CB Well, all right, but before we get into that, let me ask you a few questions. Would you mind saying how much money you had on you, or in your pocket when you arrived in the United States?

HS I don't mind at all. My whole fortune at that time, including the \$50, may have amounted to \$100. It's a lot. What more do you want?

CB Did your situation, without friends, without a job, without many resources, intimidate you in any way at all? Did you feel overwhelmed? Or were you so joyous about getting to the States that you compensated?

HS Somehow, I don't know. I don't think I was particularly overwhelmed by New York. I don't know why - whether I am just blasé or a snob or what - I don't know, but I liked it. I always liked New York. I don't really know, but I never felt particularly strange in New York. Maybe in a former life I was a cop - a New York cop. I don't know.

CB Do you recall any of the emotions that you had at that point, or upon arrival, such as size, bigness, tall

buildings, swarms of people, dress, clothes, traffic, whatever?

HS I thought it was pleasant...pleasant, I don't know. This is one thing I think which got lost during the war! Any great emotions from changes. The whole thing was very factual - very matter-of-fact - to me. I hate that I cannot tell you that when I saw the Statue of Liberty that the tears were running down my cheeks - they were not. I enjoyed seeing the Statue of Liberty and it was interesting. I enjoyed seeing the skyline and I remember the ship lying outside, in the outer bay, and we saw New York in the background. When you looked closely, you could see the cars going by, I guess on the West Side Highway (that appears to have been most unlikely from the outer bay) - a lot of traffic going by. All that was very impressive, but, at the same time, I was thinking that I would rather be there than sitting in the middle of New York bay. I thought: "Let's go!" Naturally, I was very curious how New York would be. I didn't see it from the very best angle, of course, when I arrived. I mean, people who come and stay at the Plaza have a better impression of New York than I had. I stayed where they put me - on Upper Broadway at 100th St. and Broadway, which, at that point in time, was not the very best part of the city. I was in a hotel there. I remember that I was going in the shower in the morning and there were a great number of cockroaches. I mentioned this to the room clerk or to the maid or to some-

body and said, "You have a lot of cockroaches in the shower". They looked at me like somebody from Mars and said, "What do you think? Of course we have cockroaches in the shower. Everybody has cockroaches in the shower, you know?" Just think as if to say, "Are you crazy to tell me that there are cockroaches in the shower?"

CB Were all your living expenses paid?

HS No! No.

CB In other words, from the time you stepped off the boat, you were on your own?

HS Well, no. No. I know that they gave me some small amount of money in the beginning. I think that they paid the hotel for a limited time. They gave me some small amount of money and , I don't really know...

CB Did you find your English adequate?

HS Yes, quite.

CB As far as idiomatic speech?

HS I think so. People thought that I was English - that didn't matter. Oh yes, quite, quite adequate. I never had any problem with the language.

CB Did you find the people at "United Service for New Americans" compassionate or treating you in a rather routine way?

HS They were sympathetic. They would try to talk to you on an individual basis, but there was a great influx of people right then. The program was in full swing. The DP program saw thousands and thousands come into this country. There was only so much that they could do. There is no question about it. I think that they did what they could. I don't know whether the organizations were the best. I really have no idea. I know very, very little about it - nothing, really. They tried. In my case, they didn't succeed. I think, again, the circumstances at that time might have a lot to do with it. It was a very poor time economically. 1949 was a very poor time. It became easier in '50 - it became easier - the economy picked up already.

CB How long was it before you found work? How long was it from getting off the boat to the first job? How much time elapsed? A few weeks? A few days?

HS Something in between, I would say. You see, I'm going to have to go backwards a little bit. It was '50 and it must have been in the spring, since I didn't go out in the winter. It could not have been long. It couldn't have been too long. Maybe it was November - December. I don't know. I just don't remember. I'm trying for

the season, to adjust it to the season. Oh, I am sorry! You asked about relatives! Of course, I had relatives here.

CB In New York?

HS Yes! Yes, yes! That's true! What am I talking about? One of the relatives was an insurance agent, an insurance broker, actually - Arthur Schoenstadt. He was a nephew - no - a cousin of my mother's - nephew of my grandmother - a cousin of my mother's from her mother's side, and the other one was Anne De Teffler. She was also a cousin of my mother's, but from the other side. But since my mother and father were cousins, it's hard to say really from which side they were. But, I remember that I met them when I came, but I don't even want to remember them. When I came, I called Arthur: "Oh! Oh! Your're here! Wonderful! Wonderful! Let's meet for lunch." So we met for lunch and we talked for a while and then he slapped me on the shoulder and said, "I know you will be doing all right. Call me if you want something!"

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY OF HENRY STEEBER

CB That was it?

HS That was it. I saw him twice: the first and last time at that lunch. I never saw him again! That was number-one relative. Number two I corresponded with - I mean that I saw her occasionally, and, well, I got absolutely no help from her, but I mean that I could relate to her, in some degree, on a human basis. You see, I didn't expect anything. This is one thing I learned: never to expect anything from people, then you cannot be disappointed. So, I don't expect anything. I didn't expect anything from Arthur Schoenstadt, but I don't need people like this, either. I don't need a lunch and I don't need a slap on the shoulder and I don't need patronizing. I never needed patronizing. I never appreciated patronizing - neither coming or going. So that was the last, as I say, that was the last I ever saw of him. And with the other one, I kind of lost contact with her, but that was as much my fault, I think. It was never a very warm relationship, but it was as much my fault as hers that I lost contact with Ann De Teffler. She was a very sensitive person, I think, and if you didn't cater to her, if you didn't do exactly what she thought was right, she didn't care. Nobody could really deal with her. I had a friend in Vienna - he worked for Joint, too. He came just a little later than I came - just a couple of weeks later than I. I was happy to have him here: Peter Keyes.

He's younger than I am, quite a bit younger. He's an insurance broker, too, in New York now. He had relatives here, so I got into a certain amount of personal contact - I met a certain number of people fairly fast. It was not that I was totally alone here. I formed quite a number of acquaintanceships fairly fast. So my first job, really, was that "baby racket". It must have been early in the year - something like that, for it didn't last long.

CB 1950?

HS It didn't last long - maybe 2 months.

CB And specifically, what did it consist of?

HS Taking baby pictures. Somebody would make an appointment and I would go with my equipment and schlepp it outside to their place and take the baby picture, if they let me in the door.

CB Where did you get the equipment?

HS Oh, I brought some along. It was my stuff I brought along. It was old stuff even then. Today, it would be museum quality, you know. It was old stuff, even then. I told you the other day that you would go out and, of course, I had no car and there was no strobe equipment. It was all flash lights, big reflectors, and stuff like

this. The bulbs - you had two of them - you had to have two of them. It was all folded up, but you had to carry it in one hand with tripod and camera and so on. So you went on the subway with it all held together with leather straps and then it was half-an-hour by the subway and twenty minutes by bus, and then you walked for ten minutes through the darkest Bronx or Brooklyn or whatever. It was mostly the Bronx. A lot of customers were in the Bronx and all the new streets - it was impossible to find some of these. Then the mother would stick her head out the window and say, "Oh, yes, but the baby has a cold. You wouldn't mind coming back tomorrow?..." for instance. Something like that. So, uh, I didn't really make much money - I made some money with it - sure - but very little.

CB Were you with a firm?

HS Yes! It wasn't actually a firm. It was one fellow who had a studio on 505 Fifth Ave. He had a studio, actually - a reception room and a dark room - a studio dark room - that is all. He went into the business of being a photographer. He rented the office with the idea of going into the business of being a photographer. So he probably couldn't find anybody else - so he took me. He was a nice enough chap.

CB Now, did you find that job through the agency for the aid of new Americans, or did you find that job through

the newspaper?

HS I knew you would ask that question. I have not the remotest idea. I don't know. I have no recollection how I found that job.

CB You were with him about two months, you say?

HS That's by figuring times, you know - time periods when things happened. I would say about two months. I really don't remember much about it. I would say about two months.

CB Were you continuing to live at the hotel on 100th and Broadway?

HS Let's see now.... I lived at 100th and Broadway... I got out of there fast. I lived at another hotel on upper Broadway, too, but at the time I was being a photographer, I don't think so. I lived in a room. I had been recommended to a family - a German Jewish family, by the name of Bach. They lived in the "Fourth Reich". What was called then the "Fourth Reich" was Washington Heights, you know. There were a lot of Jews there. It's all Spanish now, I guess, on 163rd St. They had an apartment and they rented a couple of rooms. It was a large apartment and I rented a room there for ten dollars a week, which was just about the right amount for me to pay. The ten dollars included breakfast, and I

think I lived there by the time of the baby photographs. I think Peter must have been in the U.S. already. I think it was someone connected with Peter Keyes, who recommended me to these people. So it must have been a couple of months - maybe three months after I came. It was all around the same time. So, I left there eventually - I mean it really left me. There was nothing - it just was not possible. I couldn't make enough money. There was no money at all. It cost me more money than the whole thing was worth. Then, again, I tried to find more jobs, I think, and I couldn't. Eventually...there is a street in New York - downtown - where there are a lot of buildings and a whole building is filled with employment agencies - mostly for cheap jobs (entry level jobs) - floor after floor of one room employment agencies - one after the other. They all have boards outside to show what they have available. I went in there. I had three dollars in my pocket or four, maybe - this was all I had, and I bought myself (you had to pay for the service before getting the address) - there was a part-time job available as a delivery boy for carryout lunches on 52nd St. I bought this job and I went right over and it was another dime to take the subway. The subway had been a nickel before. Just when I came, it went up to a dime - the subway, that is. I got the job and I started working right away, which was very nice, for I got money in my pocket, again. There were a lot of tips involved, and there were interesting places to go to. It was on 52nd St., close to 6th Ave.

It went to all the studios - radio studios, television studios. It was interesting.

This is the end of interview #6.

CB This is the seventh interview with Mr. Henry Steeber.

It is Thursday, March 22, 1979, and we're in the living room of his apartment. Mr. Steeber, at the end of the last interview, we were at the point where you had purchased a job and were carrying coffee and sandwiches to various businesses in New York City, so could you take it up at that point about your subsequent career?

HS Well, I stayed with this for a couple of months - two.. three months - maybe a little longer. We carried out a lot of coffee to the various offices in the morning and the afternoon, especially. That was quite inefficient. I talked it over with somebody. I said, "Couldn't we take this coffee over to these offices in containers - in large containers. You used to take a half dozen coffees and then come back and go back again and take another half dozen coffees to the same place. It seems impractical. So I, with a partner, opened a little business in the Wall St. section, on Broad St. It was called the "Coffee Cow Company", which was primarily designed for coffee service in the morning and in the afternoon, but we also had lunch. We had lunches. It was just one room, one large loft. We started at 6:00 in the morning. We built it up. We didn't have any

business to start at all! We started with zero and built up a nice business with it, but after three years, we were at a point that either we would have to enlarge the business, go somewhere else (the place got too small) or stay as we were. Neither alternative interested me, particularly. It was not a very interesting business and I found somebody to buy my share - my part- 50/50 part. The first thing I did was to take a bus trip around the States. I took a Greyhound bus and went riding around for two months. I went down South - I was out West and up North and came back again and stopped at certain places for some time. It was a tremendous experience. It was just unbelievable to realize the size of the country. I never could realize the size of the country until I did this: that you can go for days - you can go for days in one direction and there's no end to it. You go through Texas for two days. There is absolutely nothing to be seen along that road. We saw quite amazing sights which even today are fairly unknown. There is a town, which I think was called Ozona (30.43N, 101.12W), if I remember rightly. You come up to it and suddenly, from nowhere, from absolutely nothing - old palaces - palatial homes, just standing there in the middle of the desert, practically. This was all former sheep country and these were all the old sheep ranchers and their water was very short, of course, so they started digging for water, but they found oil. That's quite an amazing thing. And the site of things ... You would see a town

in the distance- it's so flat in parts, you'd see a town in the distance and you'd think you will be there, maybe, in half an hour, and in two hours, you're still as far away as you were before. It's impossible to picture. Well, it was very interesting and impressive, at that time, and I came back and I had to do something, and a number of people talked to me. I wanted to stay in the food business. That interested me. I was just on the periphery of the food business, of course. Making sandwiches doesn't make a food business, but it kind of interested me and a lot of people said: "Why don't you stay in it? It's a good business. Maybe you want to go into the hotel business - it's an interesting business." At that time, I had had it with photography and so I said, "Why not?" However, I realized that I needed some kind of background. I didn't want to start in a hotel or restaurant in a kitchen, washing dishes if I could avoid it. And this is not very educational anyhow. Even in 1954, these times had passed that always you start as a dishwasher and become a general manager in easy stages. And so, I enrolled at the two year college: New York City Community College, in Brooklyn. They had a Hotel Administration course, and I took it. I stayed for two years. I took a Hotel Administration course and at the same time, I worked at the Hotel New Yorker. I don't know whether you are familiar with New York?

CB Vaguely! Yes, I've been there.

HS Well, you know the New Yorker. I think it has been bought up by the Rev. Moon or something. It had a checkered history - the New Yorker. I worked there as a Food Checker and then I worked as a cashier and, again, Food Checker, and eventually, as Room Service Captain. I stayed there until I graduated - even a little longer. I went on working there for another half a year, approximately, as Room Service Captain, which was a good business. It was at that time - there was quite a bit of money in it. And, again, I was looking around for a job and found one out of town, in Canton, Ohio, as a Catering Steward. I didn't even know what it was. I figured that it must be a local expression. I knew what a steward was, of course.

CB You were saying that you took a job as a Catering Steward and you knew what a Steward was, but not what a Catering Steward was, before the taping was interrupted.

HS I forgot one thing a little prior to this: during the summer of that year I was a manager, for a few months, in a "Gay Ninety" ice cream parlor in Westport, Ct. It was an interesting place. It had an original backbar - today that would be worth a fortune. At that time, nobody really wanted original backbars, so you could get these things for a song - pick it up for a song anywhere, but it had the original backbar of the Gay Nineties with the old faucets and the old mirrors and a

nickelodeon with the big metal records. It was a very interesting place, but not really - not quite up to my ambitions.

CB To this point in your business career in New York, that is from 1949 down to 1954 - that's five years - would you say that your circle of friends was generally survivors or not? Had you broken away from them?

HS No, no. I wouldn't say that.

CB Were there other survivors like you in your group of friends?

HS Well, I had one good friend, who still is my good friend, who is a bit younger than I am. He went as a child to England and survived in England, and he came here. And the first thing, after he came here, is that he got in the Army and they sent him to Korea.

CB Well, the reason I asked the question was, I wondered about other people.

HS About other people? There were people connected with him. I would think it was mixed. I neither avoided anybody, nor did I seek out anybody. Let's put it this way - I took it as it came.

CB Well, some sociologists write about survivors in this

period of the late '40's and the early '50's who came to the United States, as clinging together. And that's what prompted my question.

HS Well, there is no pattern. I would have had to actively seek out people. You know how it is in New York - you don't have all the time in the world for social life, anyhow, and you couldn't see people very often. I lived in uptown Manhattan. A lot of the people lived in Brooklyn. To go from Manhattan to Brooklyn and back, you can't afford it. I mean, in time, you can't afford it. It takes at least an hour and a half to get there and an hour and a half to get back. I mean, who has time to do it? So there was a limitation. I can't remember... Oh, well... I will say yes, there were some people. There weren't so many people around, you see. I didn't seek out anybody. I know that I didn't go out of my way to join a club. I never liked to join anything and never liked to join clubs, organizations... I never liked even to join synagogues or temples. I do not like organizations period - whatever they are - whether it's religion or whether it's playing poker. I don't like it.

CB Another question along this line: Were most of your friends German speaking Austrians in New York in this period?

HS No, there were some Hungarian German-speaking I guess.

There were more German speaking people of European background than others. Yes! I don't think that I spoke very much German at that time. I remember that it didn't take very long for German to start already to get a little bit difficult for me to speak. I always said that it is a relatively viscious thing, really. I never learned how to speak English and I forgot how to speak German.

CB Well, on to Canton, Ohio. Then, you came to Canton in 1954?

HS No! I took the two years in the school, so it was '56. I graduated in June and I left in December of 1956 and went to Canton. I found out what the job was. It was a very small hotel. The job was to do everything which has anything to do with food. But the hotel closed in January. I think in January of 1957, so it didn't take very long - they sold it. Maybe it didn't close, but Pick (the Albert Pick chain) sold the hotel and they wanted to keep me in the organization. They suggested that I should go to Youngstown. Yes, it was Youngstown, so it was really no difference for me with Youngstown. I had to look at the hotel and talk to the manager and, if we get together, I should work there as an Assistant Manager. Now, Assistant Manager work is, of course, close to the front of the house, not the back of the house, not food, but the front desk, etc. of which I knew nothing, practically. I went to Youngstown and we

talked and we agreed upon it and again I got the word. They said: "Now, since you don't know anything about the front desk, it would not be a good idea to start at a hotel as Assistant Manager - if you don't know anything about it - so do go to Dayton. Go to the Miami Hotel and stay there as long as you want - a couple of months or three months - whatever you want - until you get a little bit of proficiency on the front desk and then, come back to Youngstown and take over as Assistant Manager." So I drove to Dayton and I met Gene Berry, who was at that time - he became rather important to me so I just thought I'd mention the name - at that time, he was the General Manager of the Miami Hotel. The next day, I met with him, after I arrived, and he said, "Henry, do you really want to work at the front desk?" I said, "What else do you have in mind?" He said, "Wouldn't you rather stay with the food end of it?" I said, "I guess I would." He said, "I tell you, my Catering Manager is leaving just now - why don't you take over?" I said, "Fine! Sounds very good!" He told me the conditions and so on. So I said, "It sounds very good" and it was. The Miami was a three hundred room hotel. It had a dining room and a coffee shop. I don't know whether you ever encountered "The Purple Cow" - whether it ever played a role in your life? No? OK. I had a cocktail lounge and quite a number of banquet halls. It had one of the biggest ballrooms in the city, seating 500, and quite a number of other rooms. So it was a job way above what I had before - way above. And

at that time, I think that I had unlimited nerve and was ready to do anything. I bluffed my way through when I had to, and some things I knew, and much of it is common sense. I did alright with it. I stayed there for three years and in my second year there, I met my wife. She wasn't my wife then. We married in the same year, in '58. I catered our wedding. Well, we all have to have some claim to fame. It was a very nice wedding and one of these days I know that my wife will show you the wedding pictures.

LS I was just thinking about it... Here's somebody who hasn't seen the wedding pictures!

CB Louise, what was your maiden name?

LS Samuels.

CB Samuels.

HS Now Gene Berry, who was the General Manager, was offered a job in Aruba. He told me that it was in Aruba. My first questions was, "Where the hell is that?" I learned where it was. In Aruba, it was a brand new hotel. It was the first hotel on the island. Now, Aruba, for our listeners, is an island 12 miles - almost 12 miles - or was it 19 miles? (It is located 12.30N, 70.00W.)

LS 19 miles.

HS 19 miles off the coast of Venezuela - let's see if we can get this thing sorted out.

LS No, it's 15 miles off the coast of Venezuela.

HS 15 miles off the coast of Venezuela.

LS The island is 19 miles long.

HS Well, I don't want to know how long it was. It's part of the Netherlands Antilles (East Indies) in a group together with Curacao and Bonaire. They form the ABC Islands down there. At that time, all there was on the island was a very large oil refinery by Standard Oil of New Jersey, at one end of the island. The other end of the island had beautiful, beautiful beaches. Beautiful beaches! There was a little kind of hotel there and a kind of a club there, but very, very primitive. One company built a 120 room hotel. That was a tremendously big hotel for this place and it was very luxurious. A very luxurious hotel! Gene Berry got the job as General Manager, and he asked me, "Do you want to come along, if it's possible?" I asked Louise. She's adventuresome and she said: "Yes". In the meantime, naturally, the Miami Hotel changed managers and did it much for the worse. So I was very eager to get out. I had started to look for another job already, even before I heard anything from Aruba. The following May - Berry left

sometime in the winter - the following May, I received a telephone call from Miami. It went as follows: "This is Mr. Rubens. Can you go to Aruba? Or rather, can you come to Miami?" I said, "Certainly, I can, but why?" He said that he was the Executive Vice President of the company and that they wanted to talk to me. So, I went to Miami. They offered me a job as Executive Assistant Manager, which I gladly accepted, and in May, 1960, I went to Aruba, and Louise followed a few months later. I stayed in Aruba for three years, until Gene Berry was transferred to another hotel of the group, and I became General Manager in Aruba. Now, Aruba is a very small island and it becomes very, very confining after awhile. It was a very interesting - six years is too long - but it was very interesting. I met a lot of very interesting people - a lot of very dull people. However, the interesting people, I would say, have stayed more in my mind, fortunately. But you know, we lived in the hotel. We had an apartment in the hotel and we entertained in the hotel and I worked in the hotel, so everything centered around the hotel. The walls closed in on you. We, of course, had to go to every conceivable cocktail party in the community and at times, such as at Christmastime, there were many of them. You would go to three in one day and you met the same people, heard the same small talk - which was dull in the first place - and in many respects, it was hard to take. In the summer, especially, we had entertainment every night and we had to be kind to the entertainers. There were many second

rate singers. In the summer, we hired some girl to stand on the stage and sing and she would have been better at many other things - many other endeavors. We had to entertain a lot. At times, we would go down six nights a week. I don't know whether it was seven (I balked at that), but six nights a week, we had to take people to dinner and sit and hear this entertainment. Some of these girls had not changed their program one note - not one word. The same words, the same movements, the same dress, everything night after night. To sit there for six nights a week and hear the same program, which was immensely dull in the first place... I acquired the habit of sleeping with my eyes open and I turned it off completely. Anyhow, after six years, I wanted to get away and we left and we went back to Dayton where we had a home. We had bought a home for my mother-in-law in Dayton, and we stayed there on Cornell Drive. We wanted to get back to the 'States - for me to get a job - to do something in the 'States. Unfortunately, in this business, it is like show business, it is type-casting. I was known as a resort manager, as a Caribbean resort manager, I had to offer something in the Caribbean. I knew all the travel agents and all the people who brought business in and the groups. In the 'States I didn't know anybody. I was looking for a job from May until December. I was travelling around, going from California to New York - having interviews. Nothing really materialized until I got an offer to go to Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico really was my very last

choice of all the places in the world to go, but by that time, it was one of the offers I couldn't refuse. I became the Managing Director of a resort hotel, the Flamboyant Hotel in Puerto Rico, in San Juan. So I went there in January or in December, 1967. We came back in '66. The end of '66 or in '67. I went to San Juan. It was another interesting chapter. It was interesting in many respects. It was also frustrating business. We had an apartment. It was the first time, really, that we had an apartment in the city. This was an advantage. However, it was a time when the unions had decided to ruin the hotel business. Really. There were two unions which fought each other in San Juan - the Teamsters and the Hotel and Restaurant Workers - for the control of the hotels. Each had to outdo the other to show what they can do for the people. It came to a point that, we had a terrace at the hotel by the pool where we had informal eating, we had paper service, including paper napkins, and if a paper napkin fell on the floor, neither a waitress nor a busboy was allowed to pick it up, according to the union. They had to scout a special houseman to go and pick up the paper napkin. We had walkouts, too, all the time. We had walkouts - about one a week. Every week, we had a walkout there for a few hours. I took it until I left. When did I leave? In 1969, I think.

LS You left twice. Why don't you tell about that German fellow?

HS That's a good idea.

LS I don't know how you got through this interview without me.

HS I don't know, either. Somehow I managed it!

CB I thought I was being very thorough, but there are great, gaping holes that you're telling me about.

HS A friend of mine came to me and asked me to hire a certain person in Puerto Rico. Some other place had to let him go because they cut down on personnel. He's a good man, I was told. At that time, I was thinking that I wanted to hire an assistant. So I talked to him and this fellow turned out to be a German who was a young man in Germany during Hitler. He went to "Adolf Hitler Schule". So he was a trained Nazi. What I was thinking is that, and I think that I was stupid in that way, a man who was once a Nazi - always a Nazi, when you go through this. But I hired him, for he was a knowledgeable fellow and he was a personable fellow, and because his background really had nothing to do with it. What he did as a child was 25 years ago. I hired him, but I think that he still was an unreconstructed Nazi. One of the first things he tried to do was to stick a knife in my back. Not an actual knife - a figurative knife in my back.

CB To get your job?

HS To get my job - yes. That didn't bother me too much, but I can't really talk very much about him. I found that he was a Nazi. He was not very well liked. He was too "Achtung!" You know that type of fellow, and he couldn't get this out of his system. Well, so much for him. We got rid of him, eventually. I got rid of him. I fired him, eventually.

CB Was he openly anti-Semitic?

HS No! No! No! He was never anti-Semitic. Never a word! I mean, I don't even know if he was anti-Semitic - if his anti-Semitism was explicit, I think his whole attitude was authoritarian. He was a super race type person. Don't you think that was really the most revolting thing or repellent thing with him?

LS Yes!

HS I think he had this superman type personality. I don't think he was anti-Semitic.

LS Well, he probably was.

HS Yes, he probably was, but there was never anything - any indication of anti-Semitism. But that arrogance, you

know this arrogance - "I am here! Look at me! Siegfried reborn!"

CB That is a good phrase.

HS So, so much for Siegfried reborn. Where were we before that? OK.. So I left in 1969. I gave notice and I started my own business.

CB In San Juan?

HS In San Juan - as Henry Steeber Associates, Incorporated, as consultant, and also as a manufacturer's representative. I travelled a lot in the islands to get accounts. It was a so-so business and then I had one very good account which carried me through, really, with a New York interior designer who established a subsidiary in the islands. He brought in a fellow from Holland, or, I'm sorry from Spain - a Dutchman from Spain. We opened an office and I took him around to all the islands and I got him accounts, etc. I worked with him quite a bit and that was rather successful. I still work with these people at times. In the meantime, number one, this was coming to an end. I mean that I saw that this was coming to an end. Number two, travelling in the islands, for me, was an unbelievable punishment.

CB Well, how widely did you travel? What islands are you talking about? Puerto Rico and where else?

HS Well, from Puerto Rico to the Virgin Islands - Saint Martin, Saint Lucia, Barbados, and so forth.

CB That is a wide territory!

HS It sure is. The plane schedules were quite approximate. Either the plane came or it didn't. The airports! None of the airports were air conditioned because, they explain to you, in the islands, we are in the trade winds zone and the trade winds cool everything. That is true between the twelfth and eighteenth of February, but for the rest of the year, it's unbearable.

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HS Then you have Antigua. Antigua is a big island, you know. In Antigua you have the airport here and you have a hotel you want to go to here - you can't really see the hotel. The only road goes around the whole island to get to this hotel. And what road! I would come back after a couple of weeks, a week or ten days in the islands - sometimes I stayed longer than that - and I would be ready to hang myself. It was just murder, you know, the heat - the constant heat.

CB Indeterminate schedules?

HS Yes, very, very tough! Also, my mother-in-law, at that time, was deteriorating. She was starting to get some strokes. We knew that she had to be put in a home. We couldn't keep her at home since she just needed constant attention. There was nobody there who could move her. So we came back. It was a combination of reasons for us to come back. We sold everything - furniture and everything in Puerto Rico. We came back in Spring - I think it was of '69. I think it was the Spring or fall - I don't know. Well, whenever we came back, in '69 or '70 - I'm sorry - 1970 - in the fall of 1970, I think... And after taking care of family affairs, I was again looking to get some connections and made one with some people I knew. I was trying to buy a motel here which doesn't exist anymore - the Travelodge downtown. It was so mismanaged - so run down. It would not have been a bad property for a certain type of business. The same peo-

ple who owned it said I should go to Toledo. They had a rather large motel there - the Town House - with a nightclub and dining room, etc. It was a rather big property. I should go to manage this. That place was in a completely deteriorating neighborhood. Number one, the neighborhood had turned black, considerably. Number two - and that was worse - there was a shopping center catty-corner across the street. It was just after the riots - the Martin Luther King riots. They wrecked the whole area, so while it had been a very popular place at some time. For some time they had had a nightclub or supper club-type place with it, called the Acu Acu Room, which was very popular. The then-manager of the Acu Acu Room, which the owners had let go to give me the place, was mob connected. The Acu Acu Room was a mob hangout.

CB Mafia?

HS Yes. The first thing that they did was to send the union in and make difficulty. Anyhow, that place lost a great amount of money and that didn't take long. I had two partners. The place was very run down. There were certain things you could have done with it, for we hoped very much that that area would improve. They had put a new road in and it was a good highway access. I had a marketing study made by Harris, Kerr and Foster and they decided it would be OK, but only if certain changes would be made. Then the place could be quite successful. Now one of the owners, one of the partners, wanted

to do it - the other one didn't want to do it, and I was in the middle. Anyhow, the place went into receiver-ship. The court appointed me the Receiver, so I stayed there and received. Then the place was sold to two people - two real estate people. They, in turn, made a deal with "Dutch Inns of America" of Coral Gables, Fla., Inc. to operate the place. Dutch Inns came to me and made a deal with me that I would stay on as a consultant until the place has been finished and then I would take over as General Manager of the place, if I wanted to. Now, the owners who had bought the place were supposed to make certain building repairs and do certain things to the building up to a certain amount of money. The lease was signed already, and they never came up with penny one. So, eventually, I got a call from Dutch Inns and they had nothing to operate there, so I had nothing to consult anymore. "We don't have anything to operate." These people don't come up with anything - there's nothing. So I reverted to my old business. One of the places I got was the "King's Table" here in Dayton. So I came to Dayton. Do you know the King's Table on First St.?

HS Is it a buffet?

HS It was. It was a long time ago. It's not anymore. It's a restaurant and Charlie Brennan was there. It was a place with seven owners and there was supposed to be a change. If I wanted to, I could buy a piece of it, and

so it was another mess. Another mess! I mean I just walked out of that. Then I just did my little business - whatever I could find on a consulting basis and doing certain things. This is just about the end of the sad story. There is no climax to it.

CB When was James born?

HS God, I didn't talk about James! This is terrible! James was born, and there's a whole story to it, too. James was born in Aruba on February 16, 1962. He was very inconsiderate because it was in the high season. I never forgave him for that. He was born in a hospital which would have done Albert Schweitzer proud. It was with a courtyard with a walk around it and the rooms off it - a typical tropical hospital. It was run by an order of Dutch nuns. All were very nice. None were English speaking. My wife's doctor was Chinese - Dr. Ho Kan Fu. His vocabulary consisted mostly of "Everything will be alright, Mr. Steeber. Don't worry. Everything will be alright!" James was born by Caesarian and I was waiting outside the operating room with Mrs. Berry. The Berrys, both he and she, were the only people who were so special to me - who were at our wedding and were there when our son was born and were at our son's Bar Mitzvah. Those were the only people who carried through. Oh, Berry - I didn't think - I never considered... They were none of your relatives, I'm sure.

CB No.

HS I was waiting out there and James was being brought out fresh from the operation, rather messy looking, of course. They had a sink there like a big slop sink, you know, a slop sink with a faucet, and the nurse went over there with him on the arm and turned on the faucet and held him under it and washed him off. I said, "What happens now?" The nurse said, "Oh, go to the room." There was the luggage standing there and I said, "Shall I take the luggage?" She said, "No, we bring it, we bring it." We talked half Dutch, half Papiamento and half English. You make your own language there. There were service tables or carts and they put the luggage on the bottom shelf and they put James on the top shelf and pushed him along with his little feet sticking out, you know, out of his diapers, pushing him to the room where my wife was. And then, when they got to the room, they found out there was no place for him. They didn't have any place for him. They had no place to put him, so they rolled him back and took him to the nursery. They had a nursery there - a big nursery - a very nice, big nursery there. They put him in the basinette overnight, you know, until they got something the next day to put him in with my wife. That was James' birth and then, the next step, I think, is the berith, the circumcision eight days afterwards. I knew it would be a difficult thing at that hospital, so you couldn't do it that way. We didn't have a moel (someone religiously qualified to

perform the circumcision). We didn't have a religious circumcision. We had it done at the hospital by a doctor. What a crook! The owner of the Casino, Jay Kaslov became James' godfather. So he invited over a lot of people before James was born. I said, "Couldn't we let people believe that it was a girl, at least until the time is over, so we don't have to have a berith - so we don't have to invite everybody to the berith?" We had about a hundred people there eventually. Anyway, otherwise, it was a nice occasion, anyhow - only the mother was absent.

CB Have you ever been back to Germany or Austria?

HS In '58.

CB Why?

HS Oh, I don't know why, really. I was in Dayton and I just had met Louise. At the same time, I met her I made arrangements to go. I just felt like getting away. I wanted to go to Europe. I wanted to go to the World's Fair in Brussels - that was the number one thing, and I wanted to go to London for a few days. I was going to see Austria. After all, I lived in Vienna for a number of years after the war. It was not a thing that it was the first time of going back since it happened. I wanted to go to Berlin, too, where I hadn't been after the war and I wanted to see what changed. So, at that

time, it was very difficult to get air flights. There was not so much in the summer. There was very little trans-Atlantic travel compared to the planes we have today. Finally, I got a place on Lufthansa (that is the German line). They had just started to fly Lufthansa planes. All the planes were, of course, propeller planes. You sit there in your seat, you know, when you're tall, sitting there on the aisle, trying to stretch your feet out with every stewardess falling over them constantly - It was uncomfortable. Eventually, you fell asleep, fortunately. I fall asleep easily on a plane. I fell asleep. Suddenly came a voice saying, "Everybody put your seat up, please, we are all drinking coffee now!" And I thought, "the German spirit has not died", you know - the Prussian spirit. You know, "everybody put up your seat!"

CB Was it a satisfactory visit?

HS Well, I will tell you, Berlin - I didn't recognize a thing, hardly, in Berlin. I had lived there for ten years and I didn't recognize a thing. It had been completely destroyed. In very, very few things you could pinpoint what something had been. There was nothing there. Of course, they had started to rebuild quite a bit, I mean, in West Berlin. The Kurfuersten Dam (one of the main thoroughfares) was very lively. There were a lot of things being built up and even that area - it was very hard to recognize. In Vienna, I don't know. No, I

don't think that was satisfactory at all. I went to Vienna. I visited some friends. It was very bad weather. It was constantly raining. I went to the opera and to the theatre and did the things I like to do in Vienna. I stayed there for a few days and then I took, at that time, very, very inexpensive bus trips by Austrobus. They were very good trips - very inexpensive trips also. I had nothing else to do for a few days, and I knew that I wouldn't come back. I stopped in Salzburg and then I went on to Zurich. I stopped in Zurich a couple of days and then Brussels and then to London. I tell you, I did really have only few relaxed moments in Austria. You had a feeling of the Nazi presence. Not that I had any experience or any personal things. Nothing! But it was absolutely, and I'm not paranoiac! You know, by now, I can't be called paranoiac in this respect.

CB Was there anti-Semitism present overtly?

HS I don't know... Not really - not overtly!

CB Not overtly.

HS Not overtly. No, not overtly. I mean, you had to look for it - probably if you looked for it. I didn't have any personal experience. However, this feeling that the same - that the same ways - you know, still are there. They were always very sweet to your face, most of them,

and kicked you in the behind, but it was that way. "Oh, how do you do Der Herr Steeber? Der Herr Doktor, Der Herr Direktor or General Direktor. Wie gets Herr General Direktor!" All that bowing and artificial fawning. I just couldn't understand it. It turned my stomach. I was glad to get out.

CB Have you become a U.S. citizen?

HS Yes, in '55.

CB Has this story - has this life affected religious beliefs in Judaism in any way at all? You characterized your pre-World War II youth as being not very religious - assimilated. Has that changed in any way at all?

HS Somehow you will have to have a lot of experiences with Jews to determine what makes a Jew? I became more Jewish, but certainly not more religious. Religiously, I would say that I am an Agnostic, in the best of cases. Maybe not an Atheist, but since there are certain powers - we don't know what they are - let us say an Agnostic.

CB Well, you see, another way of asking that question, or, no - a different way - not the same question even, is, did the Holocaust affect your view toward God any? That's a different question from saying, "Did you become more or less religious?" I think.

HS No! No! I had considerable doubts about God before and I had no reason to change my opinion.

CB Now, you say you feel more Jewish as a result of your experience.

HS Yes. I have considerable more feeling of solidarity with Jews now than I had before. Before I could have viewed - I never, really, was a Zionist. (That is the desire of Jews to return to Israel.) I think it's a beautiful thing for Israel. Somehow I never bought up the Zionist spirit. And I was in a very Zionist organization at that time. I didn't know very much about Zionism. At one time, I probably could have viewed Israel in a much more objective light than I can do today. Today, quite truthfully, I, if I analyze my feelings, I would say, if any injustices are committed in this area, I prefer the Arabs to suffer them than the Jews. There have to be injustices. It is not a situation where there can be any justice, and I think that the Arabs suffer a lot of injustices. It's hard to explain to them that it - before the Arabs lived there - that it was Jewish land so many years ago. How do you explain it? But I would say, after all these years, after all these injustices that have been visited upon Jews, I think it's just time that it happens to somebody else.

CB Now, a similar large question is your view toward what

is currently called human rights in other areas besides the Near East. For example, the Vietnamese refugees.

HS It turns my stomach when I read about the Boat People and now I was happy that Israel admitted some. I think the United States could do a hell of a lot more than we are doing. Cambodia was an atrocity. I think what happened in Cambodia - I think that we are at fault. Naturally, the easiest way and the natural way is to ask, "What can we do about it?" We have no real comfortable thing except wringing our hands and deploring it. But on the other hand very few of us really try to find out what could be done. Even if we take an active part... What could be done? If we would be asked to help, probably we would help, try to help, but none of us or very few of us take an active part and go out of our way to ask somebody else, "What can we do about it?" It's exactly the same thing - what I am blaming and what other people are blaming is the American Jews, not the Gentiles, but the American Jews before the war. What they didn't do! Their idea of help often was having a cocktail party, you know. This was their idea of helping the people. So, it is unfortunate, but we are continuing this thing. We are continuing this indifference to other people and I feel very badly about it.

CB I feel much the same way that you do and it's curious to me why, as I attempt to analyze my own feelings, why I find no sympathy. Of all the sympathy I find with the

Vietnamese, the Cambodians, the Cuban refugees, the Nicaraguans and so forth - why I feel no sympathy for the Palestinians.

HS Because the Palestinians have simply been used as an instrument. Now, things - migrations or changes in population like those which happened in Israel have happened before. This is not a new experience. The only new experience is that the people have not been absorbed anywhere - that they have been artificially kept in camps and kept in poverty and kept in misery, only to make political capital against Israel. Let us take the post World War II period. I would say that Breslau, which is Wroslaw today, was at least as German a city as Jaffa was Arab. It was a pure German city, Breslau, and still the Poles drove the Germans out like out of Lower Silesia, out of Upper Silesia, out of a good part of Prussia. There had not been a Pole living there anywhere in sight. They put them into cattle cars, everybody. I saw them - under the most inhumane way. Now, I had no great love for anything German in 1945, you may believe me. My stomach turned when I saw how these people were treated. They were pushed out of the area over into another part of the land, west of Oder River and left. Everything was gone: their possessions, their houses, their farms, everything was gone with not a penny restitution. "They are criminals - out with them" was the cry. What happened? There was an outcry after the war and again some deploring and a

question, "What are these refugees going to do? They will be a source." I don't know whether you remember that, "of future trouble, they will be a source of a future war!" And all the forecasts... They were absorbed into Germany because Germany wanted to absorb them. They were absorbed into Germany. In a couple of years, nobody talked about it anymore. They were absorbed. That area is Polish. In Wroclaw there's no more Beslau. It is Szczecu instead of Stettin. Anybody who does tell you that Stettin was a Polish City is nuts. All these cities, I mean, I know the area pretty well...It's nuts to say - I mean there was not one Pole living there - not one Pole in that whole area. That all is Polish now. There is absolutely no question about it - that this is Polish - the refugees are out of there - they're out in Germany. They have been absorbed. There is no question that they are. But what happened, do you think - what happened in Palestine... in Israel? What happened with them?

CB No absorption.

HS No absorption. Not a thing. And intentionally - no absorption. They intentionally keep them out. What did the Egyptians, our allies, now, the Egyptians - what did they do with these camps in the Gaza Strip, with these refugee camps? After Israel took over, let's face it, I think they lived with luxury compared with what they live now. Of course, it is hard on them, but, for

heaven's sake, we have to stop sometimes. We have to stop sometimes to believe, to believe that there can be two laws - one for Jews and one for non-Jews. That's what existed for ages. Whatever Jews did was judged on a different basis than what non-Jews did. If a Jew was a crook, he was a Jew. If a non-Jew was a crook, he was a crook. Right? This has to stop sometimes, and if that means war, if that means injustice, so be it.